

WEEK OF MARCH 5



DAY
1

The Framework for Generosity

Psalm 24:1-2, Matthew 25:14-30; 6:19-24, 2 Corinthians 8-9

We are created to be generous. How can that be? Because we are made in the image of God and God is generous—he gave creation, he gives life, he sacrifices for the benefit of others.

The Bible says a lot about generosity and the use of resources (financial and other). It is a theme that begins with creation in Genesis 1 and 2 and ends with the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21 and 22. In between there are four parts to God's framework for generosity.

1. Everything is God's. "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it" (Psalm 24:1). We know that the cars we drive have our name on them, as well as the deed to the house we live in. But those are only man-made pieces of paper. It is God who creates and is the owner.
2. We are called to be stewards, or managers, of God's stuff. Read Matthew 25:14-30 for a story that Jesus tells about this. Stewardship of God's resources is one of the important ways that followers of Jesus grow and mature. That's why he said, "to him who much is given much is required" and "you have been faithful with a little, I will entrust you with more."
3. Money can be a powerful tool—for good or bad. Read Matthew 6:19-24. Money can become an idol if we do not manage it well. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warns us of this: "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."
4. God wants us to grow in the grace of giving. The most comprehensive teaching on this occurs in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. Read these chapters and underline the phrases that speak to how God wants us to mature and grow in generosity.

DAY
2

Stewarding Wealth

Deuteronomy 8:10-18; 26:1-15

This is a difficult truth for us to grasp. Most of us in the United States are wealthy by the standards of the 8 billion people in the world. We realize that some of us do not FEEL wealthy, and we sometimes have more money than money as we figure out how to pay the bills, but compared to the majority of people in the world, we are wealthy.

Moses instructs the Israelites about their future wealth and how to live with abundance. Read Deuteronomy 8:10-18 and consider Moses' warning to the people of Israel. Consider what God may be saying to you in these words to Israel. How does this apply to you today?

The other central theme of Deuteronomy about generosity is what Moses calls "first fruits" and the idea of the tithe. Read Deuteronomy 26:1-15 and reflect on these questions:

1. Verse 2: The Israelites were to take "some of the first fruits" of the harvest (they were a farming people) and give them back to the Lord. How are you applying this principle of first fruits in your life today?
2. Verse 10: Moses speaks of the "tithe" (which means a tenth). What does he say this tithe is to be used for? How are you applying this to your life?

DAY
3

Generous Justice

Isaiah 1:10-20; Ezekiel 16:49, 22:29

Yesterday we saw a warning from God in Deuteronomy 8 that Israel must not forget the Lord or stop obeying his commands. If they do, they will fall into contentment, their hearts will grow proud, they will forget the Lord, and “you may say to yourself, *my power* and the *strength of my hands* have produced this wealth *for me*” (v. 17). Today, as we look at generosity through the Old Testament prophets, we find the unfortunate truth that this is exactly what has happened.

Ezekiel points to Israel’s failure to live generously, comparing them to the destroyed city of Sodom by saying, “[They] were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy” (16:49). Later, Ezekiel continues his indictment, reminding the people that generosity is always tied to justice. “[They] practice extortion and commit robbery; they oppress the poor and needy and mistreat the foreigner, denying them justice” (22:29).

This narrative continues throughout the prophetic books. Even when Israel is following the letter of the law, their hearts have grown proud and they have forgotten God. The mistreatment of the poor and loss of generosity are core symptoms of this.

Strikingly, in Isaiah 1:10-17 we see that while Israel is still technically giving because they are bringing sacrifices, God finds them detestable because of the iniquity all around them. This is a challenging reminder that generosity can be lost even as we continue to worship, and that being generous is more than the act of blindly giving.

Immediately following this passage Isaiah points to the solution. The sin of pride and contentment that chokes out the generous spirit God desires for us can be washed “white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18).

How do pride and self-reliance cause you to forget God and keep you from generosity?

DAY
4

Stewardship and Generosity

1 Timothy 6:17-19

To live in America in 2023 is to be on the receiving end of a steady stream of advertising messages telling you that you are not enough. The way you look is not enough. Your job is not enough. Your house is not enough. Your car is not enough. Your family is not enough. Your clothes are not enough. But guess what? There is a magical product you can purchase that will make everything okay! For just another charge on your credit card bill, you can make your family happy! For just a few easy monthly payments, you can look better, feel better, be better!

It’s exhausting.

We are not what we buy, what we have, or what we consume. Around us, we can see the effects that our overconsumption is having on our wallets, our relationships, our hearts, to say nothing about how our consumption is killing the very planet on which we live. We put our trust in money and stuff rather than the God who so generously provides for us. Rather than living in dependency of God’s provision, we overwork ourselves for just a little bit more.

We find these words in 1 Timothy 6:17-19:

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

By global standards, the majority of us are truly “rich in this present world” whether we realize it or not. Part of the challenge of being a Christian in this time and place is putting wealth and possessions in their proper place. What we have is to be shared with a generous spirit.

Does it make you uncomfortable to be considered wealthy? Why or why not? What do you think when you read warnings to the rich? How do you think they apply to you?

PERSONAL REFLECTION & LIFEGROUP CONVERSATION

ONE: What are some of the lessons about money and generosity that you learned growing up? How are those lessons sticking with you today?

TWO: Does it make you uncomfortable to think of yourself as a wealthy person? Why or why not? What do you think God wants you to do with financial privilege?

THREE: Do you ever fall into the trap of thinking that you have earned everything you have through your own efforts alone? Does your pride and self-reliance cause you to forget God and keep you from generosity?

FOUR: What advertising messages “get to you” most often? Do you face issues of contentment with your money and possessions? Does always wanting more affect your generosity?

FIVE: What do you think God is telling you about money, possessions, and generosity? What changes do you want to implement? What are your generosity goals?