

THE VOW

Our God is a giving God.

A Life-Group Resource

crossroads

SESSION ONE

OUR GENEROUS GOD

MAIN POINT: *Our God is a giving God.* We want to help people see how giving God is, laying the foundation for us to imitate him in his generosity.

ICE BREAKER: Who is the most generous person you ever knew? Give us an example of their generosity.

Dictionary.com defines “generosity” as “(1) readiness or liberality in giving; (2) freedom from meanness or smallness of mind or character.”

INTRODUCTION: Today we are looking at some texts that demonstrate how our God is a generous God. We want these texts to challenge us to have a “freedom from meanness or smallness of mind or character” and to have “readiness or liberality in giving.”

Matthew 20:1-16

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. **2** After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. **3** And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, **4** and to them he said, ‘You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.’ **5** So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. **6** And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’ **7** They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’ **8** And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.’ **9** And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. **10** Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. **11** And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, **12** saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ **13** But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? **14** Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. **15** Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?’ **16** So the last will be first, and the first last.”

TEACHING INSIGHTS:

- A denarius is the equivalent of one day’s wage for a laborer.
- There are four groups that are hired:
 - Those who worked a full day (v. 2).
 - Those who were hired about the third hour (v. 3).
 - Those who were hired about the sixth hour (v. 5).
 - Those who were hired about the eleventh hour (v. 6).
- The only group that we see clearly negotiate a wage is the group that worked a full day. They agreed to work for a denarius each (v. 2).
- The foreman paid the workers from those hired most recently to those who worked the full day. Each person was paid a denarius.

DISCUSSION:

- In verse 11, those who worked a full day grumbled. What do you make of their response? How would you respond?



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- What do you think of the response of the Master in v. 14-15?
- Was the Master “fair” in how he acted?
- Hypothetically speaking, is it “fair” that a person who trusts Christ on their deathbed gets the same heaven as those who served him faithfully for a lifetime? Defend your answer!
 - If it is not fair, what would be fair?
 - If those who worked a lifetime were treated “fairly,” what would that look like? (Hint: they would fry in hell.)

Matthew 7:7-11

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. 9 Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? 11 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

TEACHING INSIGHTS:

- This passage on prayer teaches us about the great generosity of God.
- Verses 9-11 especially highlight what it means for God to be some over-the-top generous.

DISCUSSION:

- What do you think it means in verse 11 – “if you then, who are evil...”?
- Can someone give an example of a time when God answered a prayer in an undeniably generous way?
- When we see how God answers prayer so generously, how does that make us want to respond? (pray more.... More thankfulness....)

John 3:16

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

TEACHING INSIGHTS:

- This familiar passage highlights how God acted in a saving way towards man.
- God *gave*.... This phrase demonstrates the extreme generosity of God!
- Please highlight what God gave. He did not give a cheap gift. God “cared enough to send the very best” (like Halmark!). God gave his son!

DISCUSSION:

- Some people say that God holds back his best from people (often in the sense of holding back material blessings from the impoverished). In light of this verse, is that true? Why or why not?
- If God gave his son (or one might argue, himself), what can we give back to him?
- What chord does the generosity of God strike in your heart?
- If we are called to be like God, if God is transforming us into his image, what does that mean about how generosity should be a part of our lives?

CLOSE:

- Close in prayer. Offer a minute or two for silent prayer. Encourage people who may struggle with generosity of spirit to confess that to God and ask Him to replace their stingy heart with a



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generous spirit. After a moment of silent prayer, lead a prayer praying for your group and for our church to be generous to the work of the Lord.

FOR FURTHER STUDY:

- Erwin Lutzer sermon: <http://www.moodychurch.org/watch-online/generosity-god/>
- Matt Chandler sermon: <http://thevillagechurch.net/resources/sermons/detail/the-generosity-of-god/>
- Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 198-201.
- John Richardson article: <http://www.generouschurch.com/3-preaching-ideas>



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SESSION TWO THE JOY OF GIVING

MAIN POINT: *There is a tremendous joy in generosity. We want to help people reorient their thinking from the blessedness of receiving to the blessedness of giving.*

ICEBREAKER: What is the best gift-giving experience you have ever had (where you were the giver, not the receiver)?

INTRODUCTION: Today's lesson aims to help us see what a great joy it is to be generous to others. In a world that seems to prize accumulation, we may miss the boat on where the real joy is: distribution!

Read this article on David Green, founder and CEO of Hobby Lobby:

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/briansolomon/2012/09/18/david-green-the-biblical-billionaire-backing-the-evangelical-movement/#34a8b23b3462>

- Bullet out some of the five highlights (especially in the area of his generosity) that jump out at you and share them in your group.

Proverbs 11:24-26

24 One gives freely, yet grows all the richer;
another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want.

25 Whoever brings blessing will be enriched,
and one who waters will himself be watered.

26 The people curse him who holds back grain,
but a blessing is on the head of him who sells it.

TEACHING INSIGHTS:

- Proverbs are almost like “one-verse sermons.” These short, pointed nuggets of wisdom teach us how we should live.
- Proverbs says a great deal about giving and generosity!

DISCUSSION:

- What do you think it means in v. 24 – “another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want”?
- In what way are we “enriched” when we “bring blessings” (v. 25)?
- There is an inherent danger here. We could be tempted to give so that we receive a blessing. In other words, we “give” for “selfish reasons.” How do we guard against that?

Matthew 6:19-21

19 “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

TEACHING INSIGHTS:

- This passage is from the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5-7).
- Jesus is teaching on a variety of topics that impact the everyday life of the Israelites. Here he is challenging them to think beyond this life and to “lay up” treasures in heaven.



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DISCUSSION:

- When you travel, do you use the safe in a hotel room? Why or why not? (Use this question to introduce the idea that we protect important things.)
- In verse 21, Jesus teaches us that “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” What does this mean?
- How can we invest our “treasure” in heaven?
- How does this impact our generosity in the area of giving economically? How does this impact our generosity in the area of giving of ourselves in service?

Acts 20:33-35

33 I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. **34** You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. **35** In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

TEACHING INSIGHTS:

- This passage is part of a tearful farewell between Paul and the elders of the church in Ephesus. This is probably the last time he ever saw them on this earth.
- To understand the background, read Acts 20:17-38.
- Because we are talking about stewardship we are focusing on the last few verses.
- Interestingly, Paul quotes Jesus in a way that is not directly quoted in the New Testament. We know that all of the words of Jesus were not written down for us, so don't assume that Jesus never said “it is more blessed to give than receive.” We can see Jesus teach similar things in other places. For example, Matthew 10:8.
- Paul is emphasizing that he never took their aid, presumably because he didn't want to hinder their giving to the weak. So he struggled to be self-sufficient.

DISCUSSION:

- In what way is it more blessed to give than receive? (Really challenge people's thinking here. Many times we say things that we don't mean. Do we *really* think it is more blessed to give things than it is to get a great gift?!)
- Is there joy in giving for you?
- Is it possible to give without joy?
- If we don't feel joy, should we give anyway? In other words, if our heart is not in it, should we withhold our giving until our heart “catches up”? (The answer here is “No!” We should do the right thing and desperately seek God to see our heart changed.)
- Think of times in your life where your giving has been most cheerful. How was your walk with the Lord in those seasons?

CLOSE:

- Close in prayer for every individual in your group to become increasingly more generous of spirit and that they would experience the joy of giving to the Lord. Pray for our church that we would approach stewardship issues as an act of worship and that we would worship the Lord joyfully and not begrudgingly.

FOR FURTHER STUDY:



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- Great article: <http://www.christianity.com/church/tithing-and-giving/10-reasons-why-it-is-more-blessed-to-give-than-to-receive.html>
- Sermon: <http://www.cleartheology.com/expo/40Philippians/Philippians%2020.pdf>



SESSION THREE

A HEART FOR MY CHURCH

MAIN POINT: *I have a critical contribution to make to Crossroads.* Help people to better understand how our service and financial support undergird the vision and mission of Crossroads Baptist Church.

ICEBREAKER: In which area(s) of your life do you feel indispensable (if you didn't show up, things would fall apart)?

INTRODUCTION

Today's lesson focuses us in the necessity of every person contributing their gifts and resources to make Crossroads the place God wants it to be. If God has brought you to Crossroads, it is not to merely be a consumer. He has a contribution for you to make. Through you, he builds Crossroads. Crossroads is a small part of building his Kingdom.

1 Chronicles 29:1-9

1 And David the king said to all the assembly, "Solomon my son, whom alone God has chosen, is young and inexperienced, and the work is great, for the palace will not be for man but for the Lord God. 2 So I have provided for the house of my God, so far as I was able, the gold for the things of gold, the silver for the things of silver, and the bronze for the things of bronze, the iron for the things of iron, and wood for the things of wood, besides great quantities of onyx and stones for setting, antimony, colored stones, all sorts of precious stones and marble. 3 Moreover, in addition to all that I have provided for the holy house, I have a treasure of my own of gold and silver, and because of my devotion to the house of my God I give it to the house of my God: 4 3,000 talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir, and 7,000 talents of refined silver, for overlaying the walls of the house, 5 and for all the work to be done by craftsmen, gold for the things of gold and silver for the things of silver. Who then will offer willingly, consecrating himself today to the Lord?"

6 Then the leaders of fathers' houses made their freewill offerings, as did also the leaders of the tribes, the commanders of thousands and of hundreds, and the officers over the king's work. 7 They gave for the service of the house of God 5,000 talents and 10,000 darics of gold, 10,000 talents of silver, 18,000 talents of bronze and 100,000 talents of iron. 8 And whoever had precious stones gave them to the treasury of the house of the Lord, in the care of Jehiel the Gershonite. 9 Then the people rejoiced because they had given willingly, for with a whole heart they had offered freely to the Lord. David the king also rejoiced greatly.

TEACHING INSIGHTS:

- David's reign had been a bloody ordeal. As such, God would not allow him to build the temple. That task would pass to the next generation: Solomon.
- Still, David desired to make a contribution to the project. Essentially, David provided the start-up capital to get the project going. Furthermore, he allowed the people to join in that process.
- David is giving a tremendous amount to the project:
 - 1 talent of gold was 75 pounds. Assuming \$1190 per ounce for gold in today's economy, 1 talent was worth \$1.25 million. David was giving \$3.75 **BILLION** in today's economic terms.
 - Additionally, David gave 525,000 pounds of silver.
- David challenges the people in verse 5: "Who will offer willingly?"
- The people give generously.
 - They gave 5,000 talents of gold – 2000 more talents than David did!



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- Additionally, they gave 10,000 darics of gold. A daric was a Persian coin.
- They gave 10,000 talents of silver; David gave only 7,000 talents.
- They gave tremendous amounts of bronze (675 tons) and iron (3,750 tons).
- The people gave precious stones galore!

DISCUSSION:

- What do you think it must have been like in Israel during this time of giving?
 - Can you think of any time in your life that would compare to what it must have been like?
- What do you make of the “foresight” of David’s giving? (He knows he won’t get to build the temple himself, yet he is investing so heavily in the project).
 - A person once talked about “planting shade trees that we won’t get to sit under.” How hard is it to adopt that mentality?
 - Why is our vision so narrow when it comes to giving in this way?
 - As we pray about investing in the future of Crossroads, is there a sense in which we need to rejoice that some things in which we invest may not be realized in our lifetime?
- In verse 5, David asked the people who would offer “willingly,” “consecrating” themselves to the Lord?
 - What is the importance of a willing offering?
 - What does our willingness say about our heart?
 - What is the importance of consecrating ourselves to the Lord in economic giving?
 - Can we give and still miss the blessing if we are not consecrated?
 - What does that look like for you on a week-in-week-out basis? How do you consecrate yourself as you support your church economically?
- When we compare what the people gave and what David gave, we can see that the people outgave David. But they were a whole nation and he was one person!
 - Do you think someone may have said in their heart, “My gift is so small it won’t make a difference?”
 - Do people still say that today?
 - How would you respond to a person who feels like their ability to give a small portion makes their gift too insignificant?
 - Mark 12:41-44 – The Lesson of the Widow’s Mite
- Read verse 9. What does this verse teach us about the joy of giving?
 - Our church is praying for God to raise \$150,000 for the future facility needs of our congregation. When God raises that money, what do you think our party should look like? (Let’s plan that party now!)
 - Why do you think the people then (and now) are so joyful when they see the offering?

CLOSE:

Pray that God would allow our church to have a 1 Chronicles 29 experience in the next few weeks. Pray that each of us would give willingly and consecrate ourselves before the Lord.

FOR FURTHER STUDY:

- Great sermon: <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/from-thy-hand-we-have-given-thee>
- Great sermon: <http://thevillagechurch.net/resources/sermons/detail/madness/>



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SESSION FOUR FAITH AND SACRIFICE

MAIN POINT: *Healthy, growing churches are full of people who exercise biblical faith and sacrifice.*
Today's lesson should help create an expectation within the church of members to operate in faith and to give sacrificially.

ICEBREAKER: Who have you personally known that you would describe as having the most radical faith you have ever seen?

INTRODUCTION: As we get closer to March 20 and our commitment day for The Vow, we are praying that God would fill our hearts with faith and give us a sacrificial spirit. Our prayer is that this attitude would be pervasive throughout our church. As we look at 2 Corinthians 8, we will discover a church that looked like this in action.

2 Corinthians 8

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

8 I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. **9** For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. **10** And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it. **11** So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. **12** For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. **13** For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness **14** your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. **15** As it is written, “Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack.”

TEACHING INSIGHTS:

- Paul is instructing the church in Corinth through the example of the churches of Macedonia.
- The churches in Macedonia were evidently in an impoverished state (v. 2), but they demonstrated a generosity of spirit that was inspiring. Even though they did not have much, they gave significantly to an offering for the church in Jerusalem, where a famine was happening.
- He wants the testimony of the Macedonian church to inspire the Corinthian church, who evidently have more economic resources, to finish their offering for the Jerusalem church.
- To accomplish this, Paul highlights the sacrificial spirit of the Macedonian churches.

DISCUSSION:

- How would you define a “sacrificial spirit”? What does that look like to you?
 - How do you think that might look differently in different people's lives?
- Read verse 2. How is the “abundance of joy” and “wealth of generosity” connected?



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- Read v. 4. What does this verse teach us? Can you think of a time where you have seen this lived out in the modern church?
 - If we experienced this at Crossroads, what might it look like?
 - What are the challenges to us having this type of sacrificial spirit?
 - What excuses do we give to not live sacrificially?
- Read v. 7. Paul refers to giving as a grace – just like faith, speech, knowledge, and earnestness.
 - How do we “grow in grace”?
 - What role does accountability play in this process? (Paul is holding the Corinthian church accountable.)
- How are a sacrificial spirit and a heart full of faith connected? (i.e. you won’t sacrifice unless you have faith that God will care for you.)
- Why doesn’t Bernie Sanders quote v. 13-14 more often?
- What will become of any church that doesn’t sacrifice or have a heart full of faith?

CLOSER:

Pray that God would bless our church with the spirit of the Macedonian churches! Pray that we would model sacrifice in a world of selfishness. Emphasize that a church cannot be sacrificial unless its members are sacrificial.

FOR FURTHER STUDY:

- Great blog: <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/spiritchatter/2013/11/stop-giving-we-have-more-than-enough/>



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