

11

SESSION ELEVEN

Once Greedy, Now Generous

SESSION SUMMARY

This session shows us how the grace of God works deeply within us so it can also work out of us to benefit others. Certainly, God gives us grace to benefit us, but we cannot keep it to ourselves; if we do that, maybe we've misunderstood grace or never truly experienced it. God's gifts of grace are meant to be held loosely with generosity, not held onto tightly with greed.

SCRIPTURE

2 Corinthians 8:1-15; 9:6-15

THE POINT

God gives to us so we can share with others in need.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

The gospel of Jesus Christ takes total control in the heart of someone who has surrendered to it. The gospel works in our hearts and transforms us so that our desires begin to change, becoming more Christ-like under the powerful influence of the Holy Spirit who has taken up residence in us. This means that one of the places we most try to maintain sovereignty over—our stuff—is one of the places Jesus most wants to exercise His lordship.

Think of Jesus' encounter with the tax-collector Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10). Zacchaeus' heart was apparently as small and his wallet was large. When he climbed up into that tree to hear Jesus' teaching, he was confronted personally and directly, and the resulting change he experienced through Jesus' grace extended to his deepest idolatries. The treasure he'd found in the riches of Christ was so incredible that Zacchaeus was willing to hold all his worldly goods loosely, committing to give half of his possessions to the poor and to pay back everything he'd taken four times over.

You may not treasure actual treasure, but we all have idols in our hearts we are tempted to give our loyalty: things, people, ideas, ambitions, or dreams. From these idols we get our sense of worth, fulfillment, and validation. Until we're willing to put everything under Jesus' lordship and He graciously removes these idols from the throne of our hearts, we won't fully surrender to Him and we won't fully be of service to others.

- **What are some treasures that we value more than Jesus? How can we demonstrate a heart of greediness with these treasures at times?**

Option 2

Write the word *share* in the middle of a white board or poster at the front of the room. Draw a circle around the word. Then, ask students to name some things that are shared. Create a bubble map with their answers. If they seem to be stuck, provide a bubble with the answer *ideas*.

- **What are some things you've shared in the past that were difficult to share? When was it easy to share? What do you think made the difference?**

Just like we might share ideas or toys or even share physical similarities with our parents, God calls us to share in other ways. Because He has given to us such a great gift through Jesus' life and death, we are called to not only share that gift with others, but to also share our possessions and time with those who need them most. Encourage students to share with someone who's in need as they go throughout the week, even if that simply means loaning a pencil.

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

God gives to us so we can share with others in need.

CHARACTERS

- **Paul:** former persecutor who became a Christ-follower and apostle to the Gentiles

PLOT

Generosity is a trait most people support. When we witness homes destroyed and people displaced because of a devastating hurricane, we support the idea that generous giving to those in need is a good thing. However, the Christian understanding of generosity goes much deeper than what we normally witness within culture—Christian generosity finds its source in the very gospel given to us sinners.

TIMELINE

GENEROUS LIVING

A model and motivation for generosity

THE HALL OF FAITH

Examples of living by faith

** Beginning Summer 2018*

THE PLOT AGAINST PAUL

Jews organized a conspiracy to kill Paul.

THE CALL TO BE GENEROUS

“I think everybody should get rich and famous and do everything they ever dreamed of so they can see that it’s not the answer.”¹ This quote, attributed to actor Jim Carrey, has become a popular meme on social media over the last few years. The fact that it is shared frequently reveals where we imagine our true treasures to be. Most of us know we will never be rich and famous, so it doesn’t hurt to adopt this sentiment because we don’t run much risk of finding out for ourselves.

Still, most of us continue to want more than we have. If we can only get to the next level of wealth—have just a little more—we will be happy and secure. The problem is that even if we reach that next level, we don’t stop wanting “just a little more.” We feel we need to get to the next level, and then we will finally be happy and secure. This endless cycle continues to rob us of contentment and generosity.

Maybe Paul had this human nature in mind when he instructed the church at Corinth to follow through on a commitment to give a gift to help meet the needs of some other Christians. Paul wasn’t concerned about the gift itself as much as he was concerned about the heart condition of the believers in Corinth. He didn’t want them to fall into the trap of greed and discontentment. Take a look at the way he began addressing generosity:

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. (2 Cor. 8:1-9)

For Paul and the Macedonian churches, casting aside greed and discontentment and spreading the love of God through sacrificial generosity made perfect sense because it was rooted in what Jesus did for us. Jesus was rich, but for our sake, He became poor so we might become rich (2 Cor. 8:9). Paul wasn't talking about money—that is too trivial of a way to measure poverty and wealth. Instead, Paul had Jesus' richness in glory in mind. The Son of God left His place of honor and glory with the Father (His riches) and became poor when He took on flesh and dwelt on earth with sinful people whom He had created. It was through His poverty that we exchanged our spiritual poverty for the riches of salvation.

How can we, who have been changed by all this grace turn around and be stingy toward others? We can't. When we experienced and rightly understand God's grace, it will drive us toward love. This is why Paul told the Corinthians their generosity would show the genuineness of their love. Grace compels us to love God as we also love others whom He loves. We go from grace to love to generosity; He is our motivation to live generously, sacrificially, before others.

Generosity essentially means being filled up with the gospel and finding so much satisfaction in it that we see giving to others as a privilege. Generosity is not measured by the amount we give, but by the joyfulness and heart behind what we give. That is what Paul wanted the Corinthians to experience, and what we should want to experience as well.

- **Since generosity demonstrates the genuineness of our love, what does your generosity say about your love for others? About the state of your heart?** (p. 78, PSG)
- **What can you do to have a more godly approach to generosity in the future?** (p. 78, PSG)

GOD'S GIFTS ARE MEANT TO BE SHARED

God does not give us the wealth of His grace for us to greedily keep it to ourselves. The same grace that gives our salvation impacts our witness. This is why Paul wrote about finishing the task.

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." (2 Cor. 8:10-15)

Paul's use of the word "equality" is curious here, as well. He wasn't saying that all people should, or even could, have the same amount of money. The Bible has plenty of passages about wealth and poverty, and not all of them make wealth out to be bad or poverty good. Christians are called to care for the poor. This is not optional for the church; it is a sign of the church's witness in a broken and unjust world. However, the kind of equality Paul spoke about concerns our intrinsic dignity as persons, as well as our universal spiritual poverty apart from God.

Why should people with surplus share with those who lack so that all may have some? Because we are all people made in God's image, standing equally in need of the gospel before the only holy God. Paul put this in spiritual context when he described monetary and material generosity as reflections of the gospel. We can financially and materially raise others up in a way that reflects our equality as persons—within the church, of course—to reflect our equal status as brothers and sisters in Christ. Thinking of it this way, we now worry much less about who hasn't "earned their keep" or worked as hard as we have for what we've achieved. All notions of earning and achieving go out the window when we realize we've been given an inheritance in heaven that nothing can destroy.

This is one of the reasons God gives to us so abundantly. Sure, God delights in providing for His own, but it is more than that—it is grander than that. God gives us more than we need precisely so we can share what we have been given with others. He gives so that we will also give, imitating His heart. God knows the joy of giving and wants us to experience that joy as well. For this reason, eagerness is heart-posture that should accompany giving with love. We should be eager to help others for their good, as well as to share God's heart of joyful giving.

GOD DESIRES CHEERFUL GENEROSITY

Imagine two small children arguing over toys. One child monopolizes a play set, refusing to share with the other. A well-meaning adult comes along and reprimands the selfish child and orders him to share, or else there will be consequences. The selfish child complies, offering up space to play and some of the toys belonging to the play set. The child who can now play with the toys is happy enough, but the child who shared is grumbling, even if just internally. How generous would we say the first child was being in this situation?

The Bible tells us that man looks at the outward appearance but God looks at the heart (1 Sam. 16:7). This is why the widow was praised for her tiny offering (Luke 21:1-4)—not because what she gave was impressive, but because she gave with real generosity, sacrifice, and joy. In contrast, the one who gives a large sum of money, but gives with strings attached, has not given much at all.

Giving to get receive something in return, or giving with reluctantly, is far from generosity. This is what Paul addressed when he wrote:

TIMELINE

PAUL BEFORE EARTHLY KINGS

Paul testifies before earthly rulers.

SHIPWRECKED

Paul courageously faces the storm.

JOY IN PRISON

The gospel advances in difficult circumstances.

⁶ The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ 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. ⁹ As it is written, “He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.” ¹⁰ He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹ You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. ¹² For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. ¹³ By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, ¹⁴ while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. ¹⁵ Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift! (2 Cor. 9:6-15)

You will notice Paul ended this section with a word of praise by giving thanks to God. Why? Because true generosity is an act of worship. When Paul said we should not give reluctantly or out of necessity, he didn't mean we shouldn't give (v. 7). He simply meant that our hearts should be in the right place. We ought to give of our time, talents, and treasures in a way that shows we hold these things loosely compared to the security we have in Christ Jesus. Giving reluctantly says we really find money and worldly things to be comparable or even of greater worth than Christ.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Moral Influence Theory of Atonement (p. 79, PSG)

According to this theory, Jesus' sacrifice should be seen as a demonstration of God's love, a display that produces a change of attitude within humanity. This theory is only part of what Christ accomplished on the cross, since it leaves out God's wrath against sinners and His requirement of satisfaction for sin. Still, it does remind us that the cross is the greatest example of God's love—a love that must provoke gratitude and praise on our behalf.

CHRIST CONNECTION

In Jesus Christ, we have both a model and a motivation for generosity. Because God has been merciful and generous to us by giving us His Son, we are empowered to be merciful and generous toward others.

YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **Even the materially poor can be graciously generous with others. How?**
Remember, we can be generous with things other than money. For example, we can give our time and talents for others.
- **Describe a time when someone was sacrificially generous with you or your family. How did it affect you?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What are some ways you can expand your ability to be generous with others?**
Answers will vary.
- **How is our thankfulness for what we have connected to our level of generosity?**
The Bible is clear on this point—the more grateful we are toward God, the more generous our lives will be toward others.

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION

10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

Since Christians have something so much better than any possessions this world can offer, we can joyfully accept it when our possessions are lost or taken from us (Heb. 10:34). This is exactly what Paul was saying in 2 Corinthians 8. He knew that once people find the treasure of Christ, all earthly treasures become small in comparison. This doesn't make money or material possessions unimportant, but it does mean they are not the most important things.

- **What did Paul mean when he said generosity “completes” grace (2 Cor. 8:6)?** *He meant that grace isn't complete simply by receiving it, but by receiving it and then generously sharing it with others.*
- **Why would generosity be a good way to verify our love?** *There is a direct correlation between our level of giving and our level of gratitude/love.*



HEART

Solomon said God has put eternity into our hearts (Eccl. 3:11). This is a space only God can fill. Because we are made in God's image, we were made for more than life right now—we were made for eternity. Material possessions don't fill this deepest longing of the heart, only God does. When we experience God, we see money and possessions for what they really are—not a source of joy, but a means to joy as we live generously with what God has given us. Joy is not found in what we hold onto, but in what we give.

- **How can we as individuals and as a church strengthen the picture of giving as worship?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What are some material possessions that could become idols in your heart?** *Answers will vary.*



HANDS

Those who have not experienced the gospel often struggle to understand sacrificial giving. The world's value is to take care of yourself first and then, if you have anything left over, be generous. This generosity only comes from the surplus of a person's surplus—after savings, school costs, car payments, travel, and so forth have been made. Sacrificial giving is a foreign concept, before adding the idea of doing so “cheerfully.” When we give this sacrificially and cheerfully, we have the opportunity to present the gospel in powerful ways to those around us.

- **Will we receive a financial return on whatever we give financially (2 Cor. 9:6)? Why or why not?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How should the promise that we will always have what we need impact our level of generosity to others (2 Cor. 9:8)?** *God will supply all of our needs—that is the promise—not necessarily all of our wants. This is where we need to be careful because we can often confuse our needs and our wants.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, refer students to pack item #15, which contains an informational poster on the Book of 2 Corinthians.

SOURCE

1. "40 quotes about life (for a pessimist)," *The Telegraph*, February 28, 2017, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/books/what-to-read/40-quotes-about-life-for-a-pessimist/jim-carrey-/>.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPSPR18Letters)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at
GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit
MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject