

Reach for the Check!
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Neglected Virtues Series
2 Corinthians 8 & 9

INTERACTING WITH THE SERMON

SYNOPSIS OF THE SERMON

There are many examples of generosity right here at Vineyard Columbus. One couple gave another couple a car *for free* when they needed one and couldn't afford it. A group of men completely remodeled a man's home *for free* when he became disabled and confined to a wheelchair. Hundreds of instances of generosity, big and small, when people give to someone else—money, time or service—expecting nothing in return! The more common example of generosity occurs at a restaurant. When the server brings the check, instead of ignoring it or slowly fumbling for your wallet, just *pick it up!* Reach for the check first, and pay it!

In this week's text, Paul is writing to the Corinthian church about the issue of generosity. The Jewish church in Jerusalem is distressed and in desperate need of financial assistance. Paul has been going to Gentile churches, taking up a collection for the Jewish believers in need. He saw this as a way to unite these two groups. Here in our passage, he is encouraging and exhorting the Corinthian church to finish what they started—to give generously to the needs of Jewish brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. This call to generosity is not simply for the rich who have money to spare, but for every Christian. No matter who we are—our backgrounds, our ethnicity, our social group or our economic status—we are called by God to be generous!

Generous people are first of all **thankful people**. They recognize that everything they have is from God—a gift—not the result of their own work. The word “grace” is used ten times in these two chapters, which means grace—God's unmerited favor—is a major theme. Generosity, therefore, is the opposite of duty or a feeling of obligation. Generosity comes from a recognition of God's grace—His generosity towards all of us! Beginning in the Garden, to the fall, throughout the history of Israel, culminating at the cross, God has generously given us all His grace.

Second, generous people are **available people**. God's generosity and grace is not meant to stop with us. Generous people see themselves as pipes and not as buckets! They are not dead ends but throughways. Generosity is something that flows from God to them and then on to others! Scripture teaches us that it is “more blessed to give than to receive.” Therefore, God does not restrict generosity only to those who are rich—who can be generous because they have enough to spare! Anyone, rich or poor, can be generous with their time (because we all have been given the same amount: 24 hours per day), which means, *we make ourselves available*.

Third, generous people are **joyful people**. Our passage says, *And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. ² In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. . . . for God loves a cheerful giver.* Studies support this truth that generous people are joyful people! Those who are super wealthy are not happier with more stuff—a new car or a bigger house or more clothes. The thing that makes them happy is the opportunity to *do good for others—to be generous!*

Fourth, generous people are **intentional people**. Our passage says, *Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. ¹¹ Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. ¹² For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.* The Corinthian believers had the desire to be generous, but that was not enough. They needed to follow through. Generosity is more than a feeling, it is an action! It requires intentionality and a plan.

Finally, generous people are ***faith-filled people***. Our passage says, *Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.* ⁷ *Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.* ⁸ *And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.* ⁹ *As it is written:*

*“They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor;
their righteousness endures forever.”*

¹⁰ *Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.* ¹¹ *You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.* Generous people know they cannot out-give God! They know God is faithful. He will provide! They do not have to be obsessed with their own needs! They believe God's promises and trust Him with their futures!

At Vineyard Columbus, a teenage boy who loved his guitar and loved playing his guitar felt led by God to give it to man who needed one for his ministry. So he did what he felt God wanted him to do—he gave the man his guitar. Sometime later, another person at Vineyard felt led by God to give this teenage boy an electric guitar that they were no longer using. That was something the boy had really wanted and was saving up money to buy! When we trust God—when we are filled with faith and are generous—God will faithfully provide for us!

In 5 minutes or less, briefly give a synopsis of this week's sermon. What insight, principle, or observation from this weekend's message did you find to be most helpful, eye-opening, or troubling? Explain.

GETTING THE CONVERSATION STARTED

These questions can be used as ice-breakers in the beginning OR interwoven between the questions below to draw the group into the discussion.

- Think about a situation in which someone showed to you what you felt was extravagant generosity. Describe what happen and how you felt.
- Think about a situation in which you were presented with an opportunity to be generous. It could be with your money or your time or your possessions. What did you do and why?

SCRIPTURE STUDY

LUKE 19:1-10

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. ² *A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy.* ³ *He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd.* ⁴ *So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.*

⁵ *When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.”* ⁶ *So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.*

⁷ *All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.”*

⁸ But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

⁹ Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

This gospel, along with the book of Acts, was written by Luke, the only non-Jewish writer in the entire bible. His style of writing is very organized and accurate, full of facts with lots of attention to detail. His writing provides some of the most reliable histories in all of scripture.

Luke is one of the "synoptic" gospels, which include Matthew and Mark. These three gospels are very similar in their content, presenting some of the very same stories. This particular story, however, is found only in Luke.

A dominant theme in the gospel of Luke is the universality of God's plan—that He welcomes all people, especially the outcasts and marginalized in society: women, children, sinners and the poor. Verse 10 of this passage could be considered *the* theme of Luke.

First century customs regarding hospitality to travelers were much different than our customs today. Because there were no hotels or restaurants, people had a responsibility towards those in need of food and shelter.

The requirement according to the Old Testament in the case of theft was repayment of four times (Ex. 22:1 & 2 Sam. 12:6).

Read through this brief story out loud.

1. Take a moment to imagine the scene as if you are there, taking note of sights, sounds and smells. Imagine you are someone in the crowd. How would you be feeling? Now in your own words, describe what happens.
2. How would you describe Zacchaeus? What kind of a man would you say is he? Do you know anyone like him? Discuss.
3. Why do you think Zacchaeus is so intent on seeing Jesus? Imagine for a moment you are Zacchaeus. What would be going through your mind? What would make you climb up a tree!?
4. Do you think Zacchaeus expected Jesus to notice him in the crowd? How do you think he felt when Jesus stopped under the tree? How would you have felt if you were Zacchaeus?
5. Why do you think Jesus did this? What message was He sending to Zacchaeus? To everyone else watching?
6. Notice the response of the people who witnessed this. What are these people like? What motivated them to say what they did? Why do you think Luke includes this in his account? What do you think he wants us to learn from this?
7. What happens to Zacchaeus as a result of being with Jesus? Do you think he has sincerely changed? Why or why not?
8. How does Jesus explain what has happened to Zacchaeus? Why do you think Jesus says "this house" and not just "this man?"
9. The passage doesn't explicitly tell us, but do you think Zacchaeus became a generous man as a result of his salvation and encounter with Jesus? Discuss.
10. Who in this story did you identify with the most—Zacchaeus or the people in the crowd? Why?

MINISTRY APPLICATION

Below you'll see some options for ministry time with your group. We always encourage you to reserve time in your group to pray for one another and wait on the Holy Spirit.

- Often the root of our struggle with generosity is our lack of faith. We just don't trust God. We don't believe He will take care of us and our loved ones. We are afraid He will not meet our needs if we are generous and give to others. Take a moment to read through some scriptures of God's promises to provide for us (e.g. Luke 12:22-34). Pray for the Holy Spirit to take the words of God and sow them deeply into people's hearts to produce faith.
- Perhaps there are people in the group who are feeling an urge from the Holy Spirit to become more generous with their money, time or possessions. Pray for them that God would lead them and use their generosity for His good purposes, both in their lives and the lives of others.
- Others may need wisdom to discern when they are following the Holy Spirit (and being generous) and when they are simply being co-dependant (which is not generosity). Perhaps they are generous with someone (giving of time and money), but in reality, they are being used and taken advantage of—it could be a family member or co-worker or friend. They may need strength to be able to say no to someone. Pray for God's wisdom to lead them and God's strength to enable them to follow through.