

The Discipleship Project-Winter 2018–2019

Series 3: Living Unselfishly

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Series Big Idea: Because Jesus, as our example, chose to live His life unselfishly, we must choose to do the same.

Lesson 3.2: The Generous Life

Lesson Big Idea: We must practice generosity in order to model Jesus Christ and live unselfishly.

FOUNDATION

Scripture Focus: II Corinthians 9:6–8 (PPT)

The early church began in a powerful and dramatic fashion. On the Day of Pentecost, 120 disciples had gathered in an upper room. A prayer meeting that had begun over ten days before was still in full operation as spiritually hungry disciples waited for the promise of the Father. And suddenly, without warning, a loud roar filled the upper room where they were praying. A supernatural manifestation of fire appeared over each disciple, signaling the arrival of the long-awaited promise.

As the Holy Ghost was poured out, the disciples experienced a complete transformation. As the Spirit filled their hearts, the promised power Jesus had prophesied took up residence within each of them. It was so transformational that its influence led them to impact the culture in which they moved and operated on a daily basis.

Not only did the power of the Spirit produce culture change wherever the newly filled disciples went, but this new experience also thrust these new believers into close fellowship one with the other. Luke recorded how those in the early New Testament church provided for the needs that began to arise in the lives of their fellow believers. The generosity of this fledgling church opened up a door of provision and blessing that spread throughout the regions the Christians occupied.

And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved. (Acts 2:44–47, KJV)

Jesus had told His followers, “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you” (Acts 1:8, KJV). However, little did the church know how far-reaching that power would be. Not only did it help them carry the gospel to the entire known world, the gospel also impacted the love and care each disciple had for one another. The

Holy Ghost impacted the generosity of the church: their generosity in sharing the gospel with the lost and their generosity in sharing their blessings with those who were in need.

- **Do you think the Holy Ghost makes us more generous? Why or why not?**
- **Why do you think some Christians struggle with being generous?**

FRAME

This type of generosity appears to be something that was continued throughout the early stages of this new church. We are given a glimpse into this same attitude of generosity in Acts 11 when the church in Antioch sent provisions to the church in Judea during a time of great famine. The Word of God tells us these funds were carried by the hands Paul and Barnabas.

Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul. (Acts 11:29–30, KJV) (PPT)

A major precedent was set in the formation of the church in regard to **generous giving. (PPT)** As we examine the importance of this subject in this lesson today, we must also be reminded that generosity is still something that is vitally important for today's church. Generosity opens a door that allows blessings to flow into many different areas of our lives, as well as into the church.

By looking closely at the instruction of Paul to the church in Corinth, we can learn the purpose behind giving and being generous.

This attitude of generous giving is **a powerful concept for those who are becoming disciples of Jesus Christ. (PPT)** By far, giving is one of the most apostolic attitudes we can possess as a Christian. One of the fastest ways to destroy the power of greed is through giving. Generous giving, both strategically and spontaneously, breaks the hold of greed over our lives, releasing us to become a vital part of what God is doing in His kingdom.

- **What is the primary purpose of generosity?**

In II Corinthians 9:5–6, the apostle Paul **applied the concept of sowing and reaping** to the area of giving. **(PDG, PPT)**

Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go to you ahead of time, and prepare your generous gift beforehand, which you had previously promised, that it may be ready as a matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation. But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. (II Corinthians 9:5–6, NKJV) (PPT)

Having lived in an agrarian culture, the readers of this passage no doubt understood what Paul was attempting to say. Jesus Himself often used the subject of agriculture in

His teachings. (See Matthew 13:18–30; Mark 4:3–20; Luke 6:38; 8:5–15.) Paul wrote that “giving should be a willing response to God’s grace, not something done grudgingly” (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, D. K. Lowery).

Jesus and Paul both revealed that blessings are directly related to giving. (PDG, PPT) In fact, what also appears to be highlighted is that the size of what is harvested is in direct correlation to the size of what is sowed. Therefore, the magnitude of what one individual may expect in the harvest can only be determined by the scope of what is sown.

- **How have you seen the law of sowing and reaping at work in your own life?**

This is vital to our understanding of what Paul meant when he wrote that God loves a cheerful giver (II Corinthians 9:9). It is clear in this passage that **God loves generosity**. (PDG, PPT) So, what does it mean to be a cheerful giver? We must give from the heart and with the right motives. Having a bad attitude about giving more than likely will negate the promise of blessing God’s Word says is ours to receive. We must be cheerful givers. God loves those who give joyfully and not grudgingly.

When you closely examine II Corinthians 9, you will discover three areas Paul discusses regarding **the reward of generosity**. (PPT) These are a result of what an individual takes time to plant or sow.

The benefits of giving are discussed in verse 8. First of all, Paul mentioned that God’s grace will abound in our lives. This means much more than God simply providing for our needs at specific times in our lives. It means grace will continue on as we give, abounding in every area of our lives, reaching all the way into eternity.

The reward for giving is rarely a one-time reward. God takes account of our willingness to give and rewards us on into the future. Your desire for eternal rewards will impact not only your life but also those who come after you.

- **Recount a time when you gave generously and God blessed you in return.**

Secondly, **God will sufficiently give all that is needed** (PPT) to enable us to continue moving forward and accomplish what God is expecting. The sufficiency of God is not for us to just be blessed in the moment; it is provided so that, lastly, givers will go on to abound in every good work in the lives of others and in the work of God. Like Abraham of old, we are blessed to be a blessing. In Genesis 12 God told the father of the faithful that he would be blessed by God in order to be a blessing to others. With this in mind, we should be open to give when God directs us, and a cheerful attitude toward generosity should be our posture.

The rewards mentioned in verse 10 are exciting when considering the blessings that come with giving. First of all, **God will multiply the seed we sow**. (PDG, PPT) God promises to enlarge the harvest that is reaped from the generous sowing of seeds. When we give we are establishing a pattern of divine reward that may not make sense to others but is fully backed up by God.

Not only will God multiply the seed we sow, but He will also **increase our fruits of**

righteousness (PPT), which are heavenly rewards set in motion because of our acts of generosity.

- **What are some fruits of righteousness?**

We must understand that **generosity is not tied just to financial giving. (PPT)** There are other ways we can give. We should consider ways to give of ourselves.

1. Our Time (PDG, PPT)

We are all given twenty-four hours each day. Therefore, this is one area of our lives that is equal for everyone. No one has been gifted more time than anyone else. Our challenge is to take advantage of every moment and not squander time on futility. As time is arguably our most valuable commodity, the way we use our time directly reflects the value we place on our relationship with God.

- **Besides the six to eight hours of sleep a night you should be getting, what are some things you give the majority of your time to every day?**

2. Our Talent (PDG, PPT)

Believe it or not, you are a talented individual. Just because you cannot personally locate in yourself the talents you see highlighted by the entertainment and sports media does not mean you are not talented. Let's take this a step further. Just because you may not be able to see in yourself the talents the church glorifies on a weekly basis does not mean you are not talented. Just as God created many different types of living and non-living things, He also placed many different types of talents and abilities in His most prized creation, humanity. He places no greater value on one talent than another. Instead, His value is placed on the talents His creation chooses to use for His glory. Whatever talent or ability you may possess, choose to use it to bring glory and honor to your Savior.

- **Other than the “out-front” talents we see on the platform each week at church, what is a talent or ability you can use for the Lord?**

3. Our Treasure (PDG, PPT)

Yes, it is true; Jesus talked about the subject of money more than anything else besides the kingdom of God. One possible reason is that He knew the value we all would place on money. Both the lack of money and the abundance of money have ruined many people. Money can bring stress, anxiety, and depression. And contrary to popular belief, money cannot buy you happiness or love. Money is best spent, not accumulating toys for self, but meeting the needs of others and encouraging those who have fallen on hard times.

Yes, money is a necessity not only for our lives but to fuel the operation of the ministries of God's kingdom. Someone once said, “Show me your checkbook (or your bank statement), and I will show you your priorities.” As simple as that may sound, it is

the truth. “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Luke 12:34, KJV). (PPT) Whatever monetary blessing we find in our lives, we must choose to be givers and use our treasure for advancement of the kingdom of God.

- **How have you seen God bless you and others because of generous giving?**

How we sow in these three areas will determine what we reap in other areas of our lives. May it never be said of the church that we were too stingy to meet the needs of the world around us.

- **How can we give in these areas to help people, as well as the advancement of the kingdom of God?**

FINISH

Darin Sargent tells the following personal story.

Several years ago, during a season of giving and while serving in a small church, an evangelist stopped by and encouraged my wife and me to give sacrificially. This was a time early on in our marriage and ministry, and we really did not have a lot of money. We had been saving up so we could attend the camp meeting taking place later that summer. For several months we had been putting money away while still trying our best to keep giving.

We will never forget what happened next. As the evangelist began to preach on the rewards of sacrificial giving, I began to feel God speak to my heart about us giving the money we had saved up for the upcoming camp meeting. But to be honest, I kept pushing the thought aside, thinking maybe it was just emotion I was feeling. What I was unaware of at the time was that my wife was feeling the same thing. As it got closer to the time in the service where the sacrificial offering was to be taken, I remember leaning over to my wife and telling her what I was feeling. She quickly told me she had been feeling the same thing. So when it came time to give, I wrote out a check for the entire amount we had been saving over the last several weeks. I wish I could tell you it was easy, but to be truthful, it was a bit painful. Camp meeting was something we had been looking forward to, but we felt strongly to give the sacrificial offering God was asking of us. True submission is never tested unless there is a sacrifice.

Fast forward one week.

While I was out watering the yard of our small apartment behind the church, a backslider I had been in contact with drove into the church parking lot, stopping in front of our apartment. Stepping out of his car, while the car continued to run, he handed me an envelope and said, “Here, this is for you,” and then he drove off.

I stepped into the house and opened the envelope as I told my wife what had just happened. Noticing the envelope had some money in it, we quickly counted the bills. The amount was exactly half of what we had given just the week before in the sacrificial offering. As we were thanking God, I heard a car pull into the parking lot. I stepped

outside and noticed it was my friend once again stepping out of his car with an envelope. He looked at me and said, “Here is the rest that God told me to give you!” He then climbed back into his car and drove off.

I stood there dumbfounded, not sure what to think. I walked back inside and counted the money. It was the other half of what we had just recently given in the offering. God had given the money back to us, and he used a backslider to do so. The Scripture is true when it says, “Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again” (Luke 6:38, KJV).

May we all enter into a spirit of generosity to help those in need and to be a blessing to the church. We may not all be able to go to places around the world and minister to those who are less fortunate than we are, but we can give and send missionaries into places that need the gospel preached.