

## How We Grow: Implementing the Spiritual Disciplines

### Week 3 - Generosity

March 31, 2024

#### I. Sharing Time

- A. How was your experience practicing the discipline of fasting this week? As you practiced throughout the week, did you notice or experience anything surprising, challenging, comforting, confusing, helpful, or encouraging? Invite your class to share with the people beside them, and then open it up for sharing with the class at large.

#### II. Teaching Time (*Teaching Video provided*)

- A. Teaching Narrative: One of the most beautiful themes in the Old Testament is the chosen identity of the people of Israel. Beginning in Genesis 12, YHWH names this identity to Abraham and to his descendants that will follow them throughout the biblical narrative. God chooses Abraham and chooses his people. He sets them apart. He says that they will be a great people. He says that he will bless them. But God doesn't choose Israel for Israel's sake. He chooses Israel for the sake of the world. And this theme is at the heart of our spiritual discipline for this week—Generosity.

YHWH tells Abraham—The world will be blessed through you. Israel was chosen for the world's sake, and Psalm 67:1–3 and 7 sums this up well.

*May God be gracious to us and bless us*

*and make His face shine on us—*

*SO THAT your ways may be known on earth,*

*your salvation among all nations.*

*May the people praise you, God;*

*May all the peoples praise you...*

*May God bless us still,*

*SO THAT the ends of the earth will fear Him.”*

Israel is a “so-that” people. Not chosen because of anything that they had done! They were blessed *so that* the world might be blessed. Chosen so that the world might know God. And we are a *so that* people, too! Not chosen because of anything we have done. Not chosen because of how great we are. But we are chosen despite our insignificance and imperfections. Chosen *so that* the world might see and experience the grace and love of God through us! We are a vessel of God's goodness and kindness to the world. Chosen for the sake of one another, for the sake of our families, our co-workers, our neighbors, the city of Huntsville. Chosen *so that* the world might be blessed.

And this is what generosity is all about. Because of God's Spirit that indwells us and out of an overflow of the love that has been freely given to us, we are generous. We bless those we meet along the way. And we do so intentionally. John reminds us that we love because he has first loved us. And it only makes sense for us to lean into this discipline during the week of Easter Sunday, as we remember the gift of life we receive through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Because of our God's unfathomable generosity, we in return are generous. We love and we give and we bless and we share. Out of an overflow of the greatest gift that has ever been given—Jesus.

- B. Here's an initial question to discuss as a class: Share about a time when someone was generous with you. What made that experience of generosity meaningful to you?

### III. Discussion Time (*Questions Provided by Jason*)

- A. In today's message, Jason began by saying, "The empty tomb = a full life." What does this mean? In your own words, how does the empty tomb lead to a life of fullness?
- B. Read John 10:10. What does Jesus mean when He says that He came to give us an abundant life? How would you describe the abundance we experience in Jesus?
- C. Can you remember a time when you were blessed by the financial generosity of someone else? What was going on in your life at that time? How did God use their generosity to bless you?
- D. Read Matthew 6:1-4. How would you summarize this teaching? What is the main point Jesus is driving home here? Look at what Jesus says about fasting and prayer later in this same chapter. What commonalities do you see in His comments about giving, fasting, and prayer?
- E. Jason also talked about how easy it is for us to live out of a "scarcity mindset." Do you agree that this is a common temptation for us? In your opinion, how can the enemy use this scarcity mindset to weaken our faith?
- F. The idea of biblical giving is often associated with the concept of sacrifice. What does "sacrifice" mean to you? As Christians, are we called to "sacrificial giving?"
- G. Financial giving is only one form of generosity. We can also be generous with our time, our energy, and our spiritual gifts. Can you think of some things that keep us from exercising generosity in these areas?
- H. God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:7). What exactly does it mean to be a cheerful giver? Does this mean that God cares about the attitude of our giving just as much as the amount of our giving? What is the opposite of a cheerful giver?
- I. Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-5. What can we take from the example of the generosity of the Macedonian Christians?
- J. Wrap up with some prayer time together.

IV. Invitation for the Week: As we seek to practice the discipline of generosity together, bless three different people this week, one of whom is not a member of our church family.<sup>1</sup> These acts of blessing ought to be in concert with a listening and prayerful posture. Who is the Spirit leading you to bless today? Here are three examples of what those blessings could be:

***(Invitation Video Provided)***

- A. Words of Affirmation: Send someone a note, e-mail, or text. Or you can speak some words of encouragement to someone in person. As we bless someone with our words, we are communicating love and modeling the blessing we receive from God as His beloved sons and daughters.
- B. Acts of Kindness: How can you serve a neighbor this week? “Who doesn’t feel blessed when someone does them a favor or provides some kind of practical support? Cutting a neighbor’s lawn. Babysitting an exhausted couple’s kid. Helping a neighbor move to his new house. These acts of kindness literally add strength to their arm; they lighten the recipient’s load.”<sup>2</sup> As we seek to practice generosity in the way of Jesus, we can serve as Jesus served.
- C. Gifts: When we think of generosity, this is probably the first thing we think of! How can you bless someone through gift-giving this week? Maybe there’s someone you meet along the way who could use a meal? Maybe you could bake some cookies for a neighbor? Or make a co-worker’s morning with Starbucks? When we bless people in this way, we are communicating to them that we see them and that we love them, just as the Lord sees us and loves us. We are giving in the way of Jesus.
- D. In order to stay rooted in the Spirit as you practice this discipline, it could be helpful to connect each of these opportunities to bless with prayer—praying that the recipients feel seen, loved, and cared for and that they are able to experience God’s grace and goodness through this humble act of generosity. If every member of our church family blesses three people, thousands of people in our city will experience an expression of God’s love this week.

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<sup>1</sup>This prompt is adapted from Michael Frost, *Surprise the World: The Five Habits of Highly Missional People* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2016), 29–39.

<sup>2</sup>Frost, *Surprise the World*, 32.