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Generosity in the Law | Sermon Notes

SERIES INTRO

Jesus wasn't teaching about money in a vacuum. His teachings were rooted in the traditions and laws of Israel and were picked up and carried on by the apostles who came after him

PROVOCATIVE IDEA: Our posture of generosity is not only a response to what God has given us, but **it is the means by which we experience God's blessing** - his wholeness, his abundance, his presence. Somehow, according to the Bible, giving makes our life better.

Fun Fact: One of the most egregious misrepresentations of what the Bible has to say about money is the so-called "prosperity gospel," which depicts giving as a kind of transaction where, when you give a certain amount of money to God he will multiply that amount and give it back to you. As we'll see in this series, the "blessing" we receive because of our generosity has far more to do with the presence and abundance of God than it does with material riches.

THE LAW OF MOSES

This collection of stories and rules and principles was meant to show the people of Israel how to be set apart. To make God's people distinct from the rest of the world. To show all the other nations on earth who were drowning in violence and injustice and greed that *there was another way to live.*

Fun Fact: If you are interested in learning more, I highly recommend checking out a sermon series we did in February 2020 all about how the law of Moses continues to speak to us today. <https://gracechurch.us/sermons/return-to-eden-the-tree-of-life>

The law of Moses called the people of Israel to be a living embodiment of God's presence, justice, and abundance in the world.

Deuteronomy 15:4-5

There should be no poor among you, for the LORD your God will greatly bless you in the land he is giving you as a special possession. You will receive this blessing if you are careful to obey all the commands of the LORD your God that I am giving you today.

Our generosity will show the world there is another way to live.

WORSHIP AND GROWTH

There are three reasons for generosity spelled out in the law.

Reason #1: To ensure the people of God can worship and grow

If God was going to live in Israel's midst at the temple, then they were going to have to support the work of maintaining that relationship.

Leviticus 27:30

One-tenth of the produce of the land, whether grain from the fields or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD and must be set apart to him as holy.

This tenth (or *tithe*) was given to the priests and Levites, who had no land of their own. The Levites were like grounds and maintenance for the temple. The priests were the ones who maintained the sacrificial system, so Israelites could be made right with God when they messed up. They also brought the worship and gratitude of the people to God in prayers and rituals and celebrations.

Every *individual* in Israel gave a part of what they had so that the *whole community* could worship God and grow together.

Fun Fact: In Numbers 18:25-29, since they have no land, the Levites are commanded to give a tenth of the tithes they receive from the community as their own offering to the Lord. I'll speak more about this next week but this is because tithing is a matter of the heart, not about the amount.

CARING FOR THE VULNERABLE

Reason #2: To care for the vulnerable

Deuteronomy 14:28-29

At the end of every third year, bring the entire tithe of that year's harvest and store it in the nearest town. Give it to the Levites, who will receive no allotment of land among you, as well as to the foreigners living among you, the orphans, and the widows in your towns, so they can eat and be satisfied. Then the LORD your God will bless you in all your work.

I love how provocative that is: nobody goes hungry in Israel because there's enough to go around.

Leviticus 19:9-10

When you harvest the crops of your land, do not harvest the grain along the edges of your fields, and do not pick up what the harvesters drop. It is the same with your grape crop—do not strip every last bunch of grapes from the vines, and do not pick up the grapes that fall to the ground. Leave them for the poor and the foreigners living among you. I am the LORD your God.

If you've fallen on hard times you don't have to scour. It's right there for you. If your family is hungry there is food set aside in your town.

Every individual in Israel gave a part of what they had so that the whole community could be provided for.

Fun Fact: In Ruth 2:2, we see Ruth, essentially a foreign refugee, allowed to gather grain left behind by harvesters. It's cool to see this law in action!

GRATITUDE

Reason #3: To celebrate in gratitude

The Israelites would be blessed if they gave. And just in case they might be tempted to forget where all this life and abundance was coming from, the Israelites were commanded to *party*.

Deuteronomy 14:22-23

You must set aside a tithe of your crops—one-tenth of all the crops you harvest each year. Bring this tithe to the designated place of worship—the place the LORD your God chooses for his name to be honored—and eat it there in his presence. This applies to your tithes of grain, new wine, olive oil, and the firstborn males of your flocks and herds. Doing this will teach you always to fear the LORD your God.

Having an insanely awesome harvest party every year where the whole community has gathered - rich and poor, landowners and Levites - where the food is amazing and wine is flowing... it shows the world what it means to live in the abundance of God.

Every individual in Israel gave a part of what they had so the whole community could celebrate in gratitude for what God has done.

Fun Fact: The book of Psalms is full of descriptions of people's "delight" as they go to Jerusalem once a year. I always thought this was a bit odd since they were having to make this huge trek just to go make sacrifices at the temple. But realizing that they were actually heading to worship AND have an awesome, joy and gratitude-filled harvest party? I get why they're so excited!

TAKEAWAYS

Three practical takeaways to apply these principles to our lives today.

Check your palms.

Everywhere we look in our world we see greed, stinginess, and self-absorption when it comes to money. Are you set apart from that? When it comes to your stuff - your money - are your palms open? Do you give freely? Do you live generously? Or are your fists clenched?

Fight for margin.

For some, this may mean scaling way back on your lifestyle so there is something leftover for others. Are you fighting for margin by being intentional to live with less?

For some, this may mean receiving help to break the cycles you're in (debt, poverty, unemployment...). Our Care Center is here to help you fight for margin.

Fun Fact: One of the most influential volunteers who shaped our Care Center culture was the late Chuck Gross. Chuck always met new Care Center friends and told them, "Sometimes we are in a season of giving, sometimes we are in a season of receiving. So receive, because I know someday you'll be able to give." It was amazing how his tender compassion broke down so many walls.

Give to your church.

When you give to Grace, you're ensuring the people of God can worship and grow.

When you give to Grace, you're caring for the vulnerable.

When you give to Grace, you're helping us celebrate in gratitude.

Participate fully in the life of this community by getting your money in the game. Show your world that there is another way to live by living in to the presence, justice, and abundance of our God.
