**FIRST, WE GIVE OF OURSELVES:**

**Giving in Generosity**

BIBLE STUDY: God’s Generosity

Read Philippians 2:1-11, John 3:16

The “generosity of God”! What do you think of when you hear that description of God? Does your mind go immediately to the things you have that you ascribe to God or perhaps to some sort of wealth that has come your way? The “theology of abundance” has its roots in this type of thinking especially as wealth and material possessions are seen as given by God for some sort of faithfulness or action on our part. There are two things about this way of thinking of which we must be aware. First, generosity is not a result or response to some behavior by the one who receives a gift. It is given by the heart and for the heart. Secondly, God’s generosity is not defined by our behavior but by God’s abundant love and sacrificial giving of Jesus Christ to die on the cross and rise again that we might have life and have it abundantly. It is this truth that underlies God’s giving and generosity.

When we consider of God’s generosity, it is an action centered on the cross of Christ. In speaking to the Philippians, the Apostle Paul reveals the depth and magnitude of God’s generosity. He says, *“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who though he*

*was in the form of God did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.”* Philippians 2: 5-8

God’s generosity lies in the incredibly sacrificial act of the cross and empty tomb. In Jesus Christ, God’s gives the immeasurable and unconditional free gift of forgiveness and life to us. That is the measure of God’s generosity and it lies at the heart of all of God’s giving.

**Discussion Questions**

1. How do you define the term “generosity”? How does your definition compare with the Apostle Paul’s description of God’s sacrificial giving of His Son?
2. The text from the Gospel of John says “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son…” John 3:16 What do you think was behind God’s generosity? How do you think knowing God’s heart of giving can influence you in your own?
3. What do you think the Apostle Paul meant when he said, “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus…”? Philippians 2:5 How do you think having “the same mind” would enable you to grow in discipleship and giving in generosity?
4. The “giving” of Jesus to die on the cross was a sacrificial gift by God. How does sacrifice enter into generosity?
5. How would your giving change if it were sacrificial?
6. In what ways have you experienced “giving in generosity” this week by either giving or receiving?

**FIRST, WE GIVE OF OURSELVES:**

**Giving in Generosity**

BIBLE STUDY: God’s Generosity and Our Own

I John 4:7-12

So how do we give in generosity? Why do we give in generosity? As with giving in general, there are many reasons that may move one to generosity. However, for the Christian, generosity is initiated by God’s generosity. God’s grace is always the first note in the composition of life. Our giving and generosity is always in response to what God has done and is doing in our lives. God’s generous and abundant love in Christ is always present in our lives, making things new, and giving us life. Simply said, the generosity manifested in Christian discipleship and stewardship is in response to God’s generosity. The living edge of stewardship and discipleship is a deep gratitude for God’s grace and blessings in Christ. This deep and abiding gratitude generates the joy and active presence of generosity in one’s life.

Our study text sets out this foundational relationship with God’s generosity and ours. John tells us: *“ In this is love, not that we loved God but he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we ought to love one another.” I John 4:10-11.* We love because God first loved us. God is the initiator of love and generosity. Our giving, our generosity is not done to elicit a response from God but rather in a joyful response to what God has already done for us in Christ. Out of a vibrant sense of gratitude for God’s generosity and gift of grace in Christ, we give of ourselves in generosity. Our generosity as a disciple and steward is always moved by God’s action in our lives. God’s action of grace always underlies our life in grace and generosity.

**Discussion Questions**

1. How would you define generosity? What characteristics do you ascribe to

 generosity?

1. John tells us that we love because God first loved us. How do you think God’s gift of

 Love and grace informs our understanding of generosity and how we give of ourselves in generosity? How does gratitude fit into your understanding of generosity?

1. What do you think are some defining characteristics of our generosity as a response

 To God’s generosity?

1. How would a generous heart help in dealing with the constant pressure of

 Consumerism and materialism that is so present in our culture?

1. In what ways would a heart of generosity help one grow as a disciple and a steward?
2. In what ways have you experienced “giving in generosity” this week by either giving

 or receiving?

**FIRST, WE GIVE OF OURSELVES:**

**Giving in Generosity**

BIBLE STUDY: Generosity and Blessing

2 Corinthians 8: 1-7

Generosity is simply a matter of the heart. The motivation for generosity is a deep sense of gratitude and joy that wishes to be shared. Generosity in itself can be a powerful blessing in one’s life. For the Macedonians, the act of generosity proceeded from a deep sense of gratitude for God’s grace to an act of abounding generosity. In describing the Macedonians and their giving, the Apostle Paul says: *“We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia, for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.”*  2 Corinthians 8: 1-2

For the Macedonians, generosity flowed from the realization of God’s grace and in their giving, they also experienced a great blessing. Giving in generosity flows from the heart and the deep thanksgiving for God’s own generosity. Giving in generosity is that which comes regardless of

the measure of one’s wealth and resources. The Macedonians gave generously out of their

own poverty. Generosity is not calculated by how much or how little is given. Generosity is not

a practice based on what might be received in return. Generosity is simply a product of a grateful and thankful heart. Therein lies the blessing of generosity. It is the joyful sharing of a thankful heart that embraces and celebrates God’s generosity in Christ through the giving of ourselves.

**Discussion Questions**

1. Place yourself in the shoes (or sandals) of the Macedonians. What would move you to give in the generous way that the Apostle Paul describes?
2. Recount ways that generosity has been obvious to you whether it was received by you or someone else. Was there a common thread in those generous moments? If so, what were they?
3. Generosity can take place regardless of the amount of wealth, possessions, or size of gift. Think of the story of the Widow’s Mite whose offering was two coins, all that she had. What is important is the condition of the heart. How would a heart of generosity change the way you consider what God has given you in life and the way you live with those gifts? Would this make your giving more free and joyous? If so, how?
4. Generosity comes with blessings. Brainstorm a bit as to what blessings might be received from a heart of generosity.
5. In what ways would a heart of generosity enable one to grow as a disciple and steward?
6. In what ways have you experience giving in generosity this week by either giving or receiving?

**FIRST, WE GIVE OF OURSELVES:**

**Giving in Generosity**

BIBLE STUDY: Giving in Generosity

John 12:1-8

What does it mean to give in generosity? The story of Mary anointing the feet of Jesus is one of giving in generosity. In this study text, John tells us that Mary took a very costly perfume, anointed the feet of Jesus, and then wiped them with her hair. This doesn’t sound like something that many would do today, but for Mary, this was an extraordinarily generous gesture. We don’t know the exact cost of this perfume, but it was significant. Why did Mary do such a thing? What moved her to such extravagant generosity? Just prior to this event, Mary experiences Jesus raising her brother Lazarus from the dead. Could it be that her generous act of anointing the feet of Jesus was done out a profound sense of thanksgiving for this life changing event?

Giving in generosity is just that. It is the delight of a heart filled with joy and thanksgiving for God’s abundant grace in Jesus Christ. It is a giving based not on what we might receive in return but rather on what God has already done for us in Christ. Our giving in generosity hopefully follows the examples of God’s giving in generosity. It is a giving that is done freely and without condition. It is a giving with no expectation of something in return. It is a giving simply done in joy and through grace.

**Discussion Questions**

1. When was a time that you experienced extraordinary generosity? What was the

 nature of the generous gift? What do you think motivated this gift? How do you think it impacted the lives of those involved whether it was giving or receiving?

1. As you think about your life of faith, how does God’s gift of grace in Christ move you

 to generous giving? Does that giving need to be done only at church? Can generosity take expression in other forms? If so, what?

1. If we describe giving in generosity as the delight of a heart filled with joy and thanksgiving for God’s love and grace in Christ, how might this change how you or your congregation thinks of why we give to God and for ministry? Is one’s giving “gift sharing” or “bill paying”?
2. What difference would the delight of a heart filled with joy and thanksgiving make in how one faced life each day with its joys and challenges? What would change?
3. In what ways would a heart of generosity enable one to grow as a disciple and

 steward?

1. In what ways have you experience giving in generosity this week by either giving or

 receiving?

**FIRST, WE GIVE OF OURSELVES**

**Growth in Giving Gatherings**

The Growth in Giving Gatherings are two or more opportunities during the year to invite members of the congregation into an intentional conversation about financial giving. The gatherings will provide a spiritual growth context in which the topic of “why we give” is discussed. This discussion is also accompanied with an invitation to “tithe” or take intentional steps to grow toward the tithe.

**Structure of the Gatherings**

* Plan dates for at least two gatherings during each of the three years of the **First, We Give of Ourselves** program. Perhaps one gathering each spring and one gathering in the fall.
* Pastor works with the stewardship ministry team to plan when, where, and what of the gatherings.
* Pastor identifies people to be invited to the gathering. One gathering could be for people who are already regular and generous givers who need an invitation to tithe or grow their giving. Another gathering could be for those who are new to the concept of financial stewardship as a spiritual practice and need an invitation to give or grow their giving. A good way to begin is by inviting your leadership (council, board, etc.) to be the first gathering participants. Then, invite other leaders (committees, ministry teams, etc.) as participants in the next group.
* The invitation to members for this gathering will be a written invitation from the pastor.
* The gathering can either be in someone’s home or at the church.

**Composition of the Gathering**

* Welcome and dessert / supper/ brunch / etc.
* Bible Study – Luke 19:1-10 Storyof Zacchaeus
* Discussion on “Why We Give”
1. We give in joy and thanksgiving for God’s gift of grace in Jesus Christ.
2. We give that our congregation’s ministries can grow in the proclamation of God’s gift of grace.
* A Personal Story of One’s Journey in Giving

 This could either be the pastor or someone who is tithing already.

* Invitation to prayerfully consider tithing/growing toward the tithe/growing in giving – this invitation depends upon the purpose of your gathering. (See third point under Structure of Gatherings)
* Questions or Further Discussion
* Closing Prayer

**FIRST, WE GIVE OF OURSELVES**

**Growth in Giving Gathering Bible Study**

**Jesus and Zacchaeus Luke 19:1-10**

**Read together the story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10.**

Zacchaeus did not have a good reputation in Palestine. He was a tax collector and tax collectors were considered pariahs because they collaborated with the Roman authorities in collecting taxes from the people. The way the system was constructed encouraged tax collectors, without question, to collect as much money as they could from the people. The tax collector was paid with a percentage of what was collected. So the formula was simple, the more they could collect, the more they could keep. Zacchaeus, the tax collector, extorted and defrauded many people in his life and he was not a well-liked man. In the gospels, we hear repeatedly of tax collectors and sinners spoken of together in the same breath.

Into this scene walks Jesus who invites himself to Zacchaeus’ home for dinner. The action of Jesus is filled with grace and forgiveness which has immediate impact upon Zacchaeus. It was a life changing event as an encounter with God’s grace always is.

So how did Zacchaeus respond to this amazing change in events? He had been offered mercy and was determined to live in that life changing moment. Recognizing that his life was at the expense of his neighbor, Zacchaeus responds to Jesus’ invitation of grace in this way: *“Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I* *have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.”* To this Jesus responds: “*Today salvation has come to his house, because he too is a son of Abraham.”* For Zacchaeus, life changed with an invitation of grace. What he considered important in life changed as well.

**Questions for Discussion**

1. In the time of Jesus, one did not want to be associated with “tax collectors and sinners”. Just the very association was believed to make one “unclean”. But in this story, Jesus invites himself to dinner at the home of a notorious tax collector. How does this action of self-invitation by Jesus reflect God’s grace?
2. This grace filled invitation changed the life of Zacchaeus , his attitude toward money, and its priority in his life. Why do you think Zacchaeus reacted the way he did, especially in regard to the issue of money.
3. Does the reality of God’s grace in your life impact how you think about money, its importance and place in your life? If so, how?
4. Zacchaeus responded to this grace filled encounter with Jesus with an expression of generosity. How would centering one’s giving on God and the gift of grace, rather than on things and issues, impact a sense of generosity and the desire to grow in giving?