

Trellis: Generosity Practice

Key resources for for further study:

- Money, Possessions, and Eternity: A Comprehensive Guide, by Randy Alcorn
 - Counterfeit Gods: the Empty Promises of Money, Sex and Power, and the Only Hope that Matters, by Dr. Timothy Keller
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The generosity practice is perhaps our greatest opportunity for self-awareness. Dr. Tim Keller often shared a story about a teaching series he was doing on the seven deadly sins. As he prepared the message on greed his wife, Kathy, warned him that this teaching would be poorly attended compared to the others. When she proved to be right, Dr. Keller asked her how she knew. “Because no one thinks they’re greedy!” she said pointedly.

Our money and possessions seek to master us. We think we own them, but if we aren’t careful, they will own us.

Randy Alcorn

The study of Zacchaeus, the rich young ruler, the poor widow, the rich fool, and many other Bible characters shows that our handling of money is a litmus test of our true character. It’s an index of our spiritual life. Our stewardship of our money and possessions becomes the story of our lives. If this is true of all people in all ages, doesn’t it have a special application to us who live in a time and place of unparalleled affluence? who live in a society where almost everyone enjoys comforts and conveniences that King Solomon never dreamed of? who live in a country where the “poverty level” exceeds the average standard of living of nearly every other society in human history, past or present?

We come to the Bible for comfort, not financial instruction. If we want to know about money, we’re more apt to pick up The Wall Street Journal or Fortune or Forbes. Scripture should concern itself with what’s spiritual and heavenly. Money is physical and earthly. The Bible is religious; money is secular. Let God talk about love and grace and brotherhood, thank you. Let the rest of us talk about money and possessions—and do whatever we want with them. How could the Bible’s Author and Editor justify devoting twice as many verses to money (about 2,350 of them) than to faith and prayer combined? How could Jesus say more about money than about both heaven and hell? Didn’t he know what was really important?

Week 1: Mammon

In our Sabbath Practice we discussed the Titan Chronos—the tyrannical god of time, who’s ruthless reign makes us slaves to the clock and the looming specter of death.

This mythical figure represents a very real threat: time is a zero sum game and the ultimate exhaustible resource. If we run out of it, we will be crushed. We discussed Sabbath-keeping as our declaration of independence from Chronos. As we reject his lies we are made free from the tyranny of time. As those who have eternal life, we are free to enter “Kairos” time, or sacred time.

Mammon (commonly thought of as the god of greed/wealth) is, in many ways, the counterpart to Chronos. Our money and possessions are like time—limited. Exhaustible. A zero sum game. As a result we can easily be controlled by a sense of scarcity and fear.

Jesus said it plainly: Luke 16:13 (NKJV) **“No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”**

As Jesus implied, Mammon isn’t just looking for respect or appreciation, it wants to be our lord, it wants our allegiance. Our generous God is nothing like Mammon, except in this respect: they both want our undivided hearts. That’s why Jesus insists that the two are in opposition, **“...he will be loyal to one and despise the other.”** Why not love one more, and the other less? Because God and Mammon (or greed) both want the same thing—our hearts.

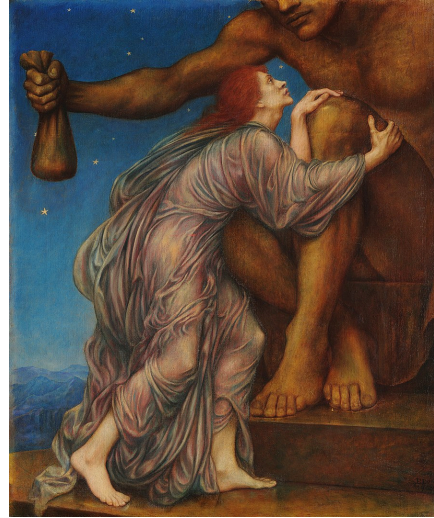
We can declare our freedom from the tyranny of Mammon by living lifestyles of generosity. In the coming weeks we’ll discuss how to do this, and consider what that might look like for each of us. But first, we need to honestly evaluate if Mammon has our hearts. This is harder than it sounds because, as Jesus taught, the love of money has a way of blinding us to reality.

Matthew 6:19–24 (NLT):

19 “Don’t store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. 21 Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.

22 “Your eye is like a lamp that provides light for your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is filled with light. 23 But when your eye is unhealthy, your whole body is filled with darkness. And if the light you think you have is actually darkness, how deep that darkness is!

24 “No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money.



1909 painting The Worship of Mammon by Evelyn De Morgan

Why does Jesus talk about where our treasure is (vss 19-21), then talk about the eye being the lamp of the body (vss 22-23), and then go back to talking about money (vs 24)? It seems random. It's not. A cultural barrier keeps us from noticing what would have been obvious to Jesus' ancient near eastern audience, which is a play-on-words around the terms *healthy* and *unhealthy*. In Jesus' context those words were used almost interchangeably with being *generous* and *stingy*. So, in short, Jesus is saying when we see things clearly, we are generous. When we do not, we are not.

This boils down to perspective. If we maintain perspective (or, a healthy eye), we will keep eternity in view, and look to store our treasures there. If not, we will focus on accumulating all that we can in this life, with little regard for the next.

Mammon has an uncanny ability to cloud our perspective. If people of moderate means spend time with the poor, they will soon feel guilty for their abundance and look to share. If those same people spend time with the rich, they will soon covet what they lack and grow increasingly fixated on growing their wealth. Why? In each case the people were of moderate means. Their finances didn't change, only their perspective.

This dynamic is often called 'the hedonic treadmill.' The theory goes like this: We are hedonists by nature (hedonism is the pursuit of pleasure above all else). We each have a baseline level of happiness... a set point. As we accumulate money, possessions, luxuries, status, etc we experience a measure of happiness as a result. However, in short order we return to our baseline, or set point. Now, in order to raise our happiness we must accumulate more, only now there's an even higher bar to get over. And the cycle repeats. It's not unlike a drug addict who needs more and more to reach the same high. That's the hedonic treadmill. The vast majority of Americans are running frantically on that treadmill, such that each success on makes them run faster, providing no lasting joy.

The hedonic treadmill, is why there are repeated warnings to the rich, when it's also made perfectly clear that there's nothing wrong with being rich, and that God even, at times, blesses people with wealth.

Have you ever wondered about that? God made Abraham rich, as a blessing. He made Job rich, as a blessing, David, Solomon, etc...

So why did Jesus and others give urgent, repeated, warnings to the rich?

- Matthew 19:24 *...it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."*
- Mark 10:23 *And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!"*
- Luke 1:53 *he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.*
- Luke 6:14 *"But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation."*
- James 1:9-10 *Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, 10 and the rich in his humiliation,*
- James 5:1 *Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you.*

Why the warnings to the rich, when wealth can be a blessing? Because, although there's nothing inherently wrong with wealth (and it can be an incredible force for good), it's extremely powerful, and it can blind us to reality, steal our perspective, and ultimately our hearts. ***Mammon is a skilled and deceitful hunter.***

God's desire is for us to have more than enough. Jesus taught,

Luke 6:38 (NLT): *38 Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full—pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back.*

Malachi 3:10 (NLT): *10 Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies, "I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won't have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test!*

Poverty is not the goal. Our abundance can be mercy for the poor. The goal is contentment. Can we be content with what we have? As Paul warned his apprentice, Timothy, whether we have a little or a lot, if we are discontent we are in danger of falling into Mammon's trap:

1 Timothy 6:6–10 (CSB): *6 But godliness with contentment is great gain. 7 For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out. 8 If we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. 9 But those who want to be rich fall into temptation, a trap, and many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge people into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and by craving it, some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.*

Discussion

**as this week's study is more of a cohesive teaching, consider sending the above lesson to your group in advance, and walking through it together as you meet.*

- What are some signs that a desire for money is causing us to lose perspective?
- Can you think of a movie/book/story in which someone was caught on a hedonic treadmill? How did that work out?
- What are some ways someone might get off that treadmill? How can we regain perspective?
- Why does a wealthy person have to be especially mindful of losing perspective?
- Do you think the average American is wealthy? (Refer to: www.givingwhatwecan.org/how-rich-am-i)

Week 2: Tithe?

There's a fierce debate over whether or not Christians are required to tithe (a 'tithe' means 'one tenth' and refers to giving 10% of one's income). Reasonable and sincere Christians disagree on this one, so the conversation requires some nuance. I'll share what has been the position of our church (and my position, too) but, in the end, it's something you'll need to decide for yourself.

In the Old Testament this is pretty straightforward. Tithing was explicitly commanded.

- Leviticus 27:30 (CSB): *30 "Every tenth of the land's produce, grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord.*
- Malachi 3:8–12 (NLT): *8 "Should people cheat God? Yet you have cheated me! "But you ask, 'What do you mean? When did we ever cheat you?' "You have cheated me of the tithes and offerings due to me. 9 You are under a curse, for your whole nation has been cheating me. 10 Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies, "I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won't have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test! 11 Your crops will be abundant, for I will guard them from insects and disease. Your grapes will not fall from the vine before they are ripe," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies. 12 "Then all nations will call you blessed, for your land will be such a delight," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies.*

Randy Alcorn:

Actually, there was not just one tithe for Israelites, but three. One tithe supported the priests and Levites (Numbers 18:21, 24), another provided for a sacred festival (Deuteronomy 12:17-18; 14:23), and the third tithe supported orphans, widows, and the poor (Deuteronomy 14:28-29; 26:12-13). The obedient Israelite didn't ask whether he could give 7 percent, or whether he could tithe on the "net" rather than the "gross." The Levite and festival tithes were perpetual tithes, but the tithe for the poor was collected only every third year. This amounted to an average of 23 percent per year. Because Israel was a nation as well as a spiritual community, some of these funds would equate to taxes that we pay today. However, the first and most basic tithe was for religious purposes, specifically to support the spiritual leaders, freeing them to fulfill God's calling, and providing the resources necessary to do their job well.

Some of the above has been interpreted in different ways but, suffice to say, a perpetual tithe of 10% given to the temple was the Old Testament standard. This was the teaching found in the Mosaic Law, but it was in practice before that:

Randy Alcorn:

The practice of tithing began long before the law of Moses. Abraham tithed to the high priest Melchizedek (Genesis 14:20). Jacob promised a tithe to the Lord (Genesis 28:22).

This was done in addition to various voluntary contributions and to other laws about caring for the poor, orphans, foreigners and widows.

In the New Testament there is an important tonal shift.

The early church father Irenaeus summed it up well:

“The Jews were constrained to a regular payment of tithes; Christians, who have liberty, assign all their possessions to the Lord, bestowing freely not the lesser portions of their property, since they have the hope of greater things.”

Neither Jesus nor the Apostles repeated the command to tithe in the New Testament. This has led many to conclude that the command to tithe is no longer binding upon Christians today. Perhaps they are right. Tithing can quickly turn into legalism.

On one occasion Jesus was scolding the Pharisees, but affirmed their tithing in the process:

- Matthew 23:23 (NLT): *23 “What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest income from your herb gardens, but you ignore the more important aspects of the law—justice, mercy, and faith. You should tithe, yes, but do not neglect the more important things.*

This is the closest thing we find in the New Testament to a repetition of the Old Testament command to tithe. How should we think about that? Perhaps we should simply take Jesus at his word—he commends their tithing, but pleads with them to stop neglecting weightier matters like just as justice, mercy and faith.

Jesus did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17). Every other example of giving that is commended in the New Testament is an example of God’s people being led by the Holy Spirit to be radically generous, and exceeded the tithe. For this reason our teaching at Vineyard Church has been for us to give as the Spirit leads us (not under compulsion 2 Cor 9:6-9) using tithing as a **template**. In other words, if we are unsure how to give, tithing is an excellent model.

Regardless of what we conclude personally about whether or not tithing is a mandate upon Christians today, the point is essentially moot. Here’s why: what is beyond dispute is that the New Testament model is to walk with Jesus and obey him as he leads us in everything. In that case, we will not only give joyfully, but our giving will be radical, sacrificial, and Spirit-led. It will be pleasing to the Lord and fruitful for the kingdom.

Where do I give?

Another subject of debate is whether or not Christians must give to the church. Or, depending on the where they land on the tithing debate, do they give tithes to the church, and additional offerings other places?

While this is an important question, I (Aaron) don't see that it's explicitly addressed in the New Testament. That said, it's my conviction that the church is God's plan A for saving the world, and that there's no plan B. For that reason, my suggestion has been that we give first and foremost to the church, and let the Lord lead us in our additional giving.

Discussion

**as this week's study is more of a cohesive teaching, consider sending the above lesson to your group in advance, and walking through it together as you meet.*

- What are the main points made by each side of the tithing debate?
- Why has Vineyard Church historically encouraged people to 'give using tithing as a template'? Is this something we must all agree upon?
- In what sense is the tithing debate a moot point for Christians today?
- Why do you suppose the debate on this is especially fierce? Do you think that tells us something?
- Regardless of which position we take, the challenge is to walk with Jesus and obey his leadership. Why is this particularly hard to do when it comes to money?
- Why are time and money such accurate measures of our values?

Week 3: Carrying out your good intentions

When I (Aaron) teach on money or sex, almost no one talks to me after church. Eye contact is hard to come by. Why would that be? Shame. Many of us are nagged by the feeling that we aren't giving as we should. Sadly, many have taken advantage of that shame and used fear and manipulation to generate compulsory giving, rather than the kind fueled by gratitude and joy. But even if we avoid those manipulations, it's hard to know how much we should give. C.S. Lewis has a helpful perspective:

"I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc, is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charitable expenditure excludes them."

In other words, it should be sacrificial. It's common for well-intended people to plan to give a certain amount, only to look back and realize that they were not nearly as generous as they had planned. Their actions did not align with their values.

Let's look at 3 ways that may help us avoid that same error.

1. Think in terms of percentages not amounts

A wide swath of financial advisors agree on this simple advice. Amounts get obscured as our income rises or falls—but percentages are a reflection of our values. According to our values, our understanding of scripture, our most deeply held convictions, and how the Spirit is directing us, what ***percentage*** should we:

- Give
- Save
- Spend

If, for example, we give 15% of our income away only 85% remains. If we save another 15% only 70% remains. In that case our spending would be limited to the 70% that's left over. Choosing to give, then save, then spend, in that order also sets a hierarchy of priorities. First we give, then we save, and spending is limited to what remain. This is just basic math, of course, but the power of this approach is that it keeps Mammon at bay. The question of which master we serve (Luke 16:13) is addressed out of the gate... and the slow creeping trend of Mammon's deception is thwarted.

Once these percentages are set, they will need to be revisited often. Our circumstances change, and remember: ***the primary objective is to listen and obey the dynamic leadership of the Holy Spirit in our lives.***

As we've said along the way, finances are a zero sum game. It's a well documented trend that as people make more money, they tend to give a smaller percentage of that money away (even if the amount given increases). With the clearest principle in scripture being about sacrifice, this misses the mark significantly.

In his monumental book *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, Ron Sider suggests a graduated tithe to combat this tendency. With this approach Christians give a higher percentage of their income as their income increases. In short, once a household is tithing they choose that for every additional \$1,000 earned they give an additional 5% of that added income. As a result, they give a greater percentage as their income increases, as opposed to succumbing to the opposite trend. It's an interesting approach. Is this a command? Certainly not! As we've seen, it's debatable as to whether not giving a tithe is a command to us today—much less a graduated one. But the principle is vital: we need an intentional approach to fight off greed, overconsumption, and 'the disease of more' as it's often called. How will you fight off Mammon's relentless approach? What percentage will you give, save, and spend?

2. Transparency

Here's an awkward thought experiment: What if we all brought a thorough personal financial summary to our group in a folder, and then we handed that folder to the person next to us, giving them permission to manage our finances in full? Deep breath, WE WILL NOT BE DOING THIS!, but the unsettling reality is that most of us would be much better off financially if we did.

The reason is simple— I would have no trouble at all being generous with YOUR money! Nor would it be a struggle for me to consistently save YOUR money or to make YOU be patient and save up before buying the next expensive toy that catches YOUR eye! Although financial management can be tricky, at its core most of us know what to do. Also, most of us want to be truly generous, to save wisely, and to spend frugally. The intent is there... it's the execution that's most often lacking. So, since we're not going to be handing our finances off to one another, what can we do?

First of all, don't dismiss the idea immediately. It's an extreme measure, but it's been done by many people over the years. Short of that, consider how you might have *some measure* of accountability to someone you trust who lives outside of your home. For example, without disclosing any dollar amounts, you could tell someone the percentages you plan to give, save, and spend, and ask them to hold you accountable. A growing trend is to set a purchase threshold. For example, "I will not spend more than \$500 unbudgeted dollars without discussing it with a trusted friend."

There are many potential applications, but the principle is simple: we need some measure of transparency and accountability to trusted people outside of our homes in order to help keep Mammon caged.

3. Plan / Routine

This one is simple. Routines allow us to live lifestyles of generosity by making financial decisions in advance, during moments of clarity—and not in the heat of a moment when we are tempted to splurge in a way that would violate our own priorities.

First and foremost is setting and keeping a budget. This is the first and ultimate step toward financial well-being, and financial well-being empowers us to be generous! There are many resources available to help you do this. Also, things like eliminating credit cards, or setting spending limits on credit cards, are very helpful in staving off budget-breaking impulse buys.

As we've said, it's common for people to give much less than they intend. Most churches and organizations are set up to receive recurring gifts. This is a simple but powerful way to insure that you give as your values dictate.

Discussion

**as this week's study is more of a cohesive teaching, consider sending the above lesson to your group in advance, and walking through it together as you meet.*

- Why is it important to set percentages instead of amounts?
- Why is it likely that the person next to us could manage our finances better than we could? What does that tell us about the threat of Mammon?
- What are some ways people can be accountable to one another in how they give, save and spend?
- Does the idea of giving up some financial privacy in the interest of accountability make you uncomfortable? Why do you think that is?
- Would someone be willing to share a personal story about the benefits setting and keeping a budget?

Pray for one another.

Week 4: Gratuitous

I love words! They're powerful and interesting and complicated. Many words have a wide lexical range, layering meanings and connotations and historical baggage. 'Gratuitous' is great word! It's heavy and visceral and evocative. It wants to be said with a snarl and a squint... it's an ugly, cringy, bully of a word.

By definition it means:

1. *Uncalled for; lacking good reasons; unwarranted*

Example: "gratuitous violence" or "gratuitous nudity"

And yet, as clear and as aggressive as the word gratuitous sounds to our ears, that's not at all what it used to mean. If you look the word up in any dictionary, you'll find the standard meaning above, but you'll also find it's secondary meaning... which, for most of the life of the word, was it's primary meaning.

Gratuitous

2. *Given or done free of charge. Spontaneous, unmerited, without receiving payment.*

Example: "Gratuitous generosity"

Gratuitous used to be a word that meant extreme generosity.

It's from a Latin word that popped up in the 1600's: *gratuitus*, from the root *gratus*.... which means to show favor. This is where we get words like *gratitude*, and *gracious*, and *gratuity*.

This original meaning carried along with it the idea of being unnecessary or uncalled for — which was brought forward into it's current meaning— but it didn't refer to unnecessary violence, greed or nudity, it referred to uncalled for, unnecessary, even excessive **generosity**. This is the best encapsulation I can find for the examples of generosity we find in the early church. They were gratuitous.

In Luke 10, Jesus told one of his most poignant parables which cuts right to the quick of what it means to follow him, and to detach ourselves from the distorted values of our world.

LUKE 10 (NLT)

30 Jesus replied with a story: "A Jewish man was traveling from Jerusalem down to Jericho, and he was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him up, and left him half dead beside the road.

31 "By chance a priest came along. But when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by. 32 A Temple assistant walked over and looked at him lying there, but he also passed by on the other side.

33 "Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him. 34 Going over to him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. 35 The next day he handed the innkeeper two silver coins, telling him, 'Take care of this man. If his bill runs higher than this, I'll pay you the next time I'm here.'

36 "Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?" Jesus asked.

37 The man replied, "The one who showed him mercy." Then Jesus said, "Yes, now go and do the same."

This story is just one part of a well-established pattern in the New Testament: gratuitous generosity. That is, generosity that was above and beyond, unmerited, uncalled for. This, it appears, is the standard for Jesus' followers.

In the Old Testament, the means and methods of generosity were very clearly defined, and even prescribed. A tenth of their income was to be given to the ministry of the temple, those who owned lands were told to corner their fields, leaving the corners to be harvested by the poor and the hungry. They were told to welcome foreigners, and to provide for widows and orphans, and they were told to make sacrifices in accordance to very clear standards based on income and the sins they'd committed.

Generosity was presented as a value to God... *it was called for*. And then, in the New Testament, there's a shift. It sits on the foundation of the Old Testament. The standards are in no way lowered, in fact, they are raised in every way... but there is a shift. Jesus celebrates the people who did the things that were *uncalled for*... While rebuking the people who simply obeyed the laws, and did only what was called for.

In the New Testament, gratuitous generosity—UNCALLED FOR, UNMERITED GENEROSITY— is the norm.

- In Mark 12, Jesus said that the widow who gave her last penny, gave more than the wealthy who gave huge amounts. There is no Old Testament precedent for giving your last penny. There's no such commandment. It's not called for in the law... it was uncalled for. But the Spirit of God stirred her heart, she responded with gratuitous generosity, and Jesus celebrated her for it.
- In Luke 19, Zacchaeus climbed up in a tree to see Jesus. When he encountered the love of Jesus he just blurted out: "I'm going to give away half of my stuff... and if I've ripped people off, I'll pay them back 4 times over!" That was uncalled for... but an encounter with Jesus, made gratuitous generosity well up within him.
- In Acts, there are accounts of people selling their stuff to fuel the ministry of the church, and to serve the poor...
- The Macedonians, as Paul wrote in I Cor. 8, gave according to their means, and beyond their means, without any arm-twisting... and Paul honors them for it.

There are no commandments for these things! These were godly people, who were stirred by the Spirit within them to be radically generous. They aren't copiously following the rules... they're following the Spirit.

I've probably drawn too clear of a line between the Old Testament and the new. There are calls to gratuitous generosity there too, particularly in the Prophets. If you read them through, you'll hear men like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Micah begging people to get past the hollow rituals of doing the stuff that's been explicitly called for... and inviting them to a more dynamic way of following God's heart.

The difference is that in the Old Testament those calls mostly landed on deaf ears... while in the NT, there's not really even a call—people just do it. It's natural, unrehearsed, spontaneous. Why? It's as if there was something they understood, that they didn't understand before.

When I think of gratuitous violence, I think of the cross. Nothing could be more ruthless, or more uncalled for. But when I think of gratuitous generosity, once again, I think of the cross.

His punishment was uncalled for. Gratuitous. And the generosity of the cross was uncalled for, too... completely unmerited. The sacrifice of Jesus set a new standard... it demonstrated how love calls for the uncalled for. It summons the kind of generosity, that can't be demanded, it can only be inspired.

On this side of the cross, generosity means something different. When we see that the God of the universe suffered and died to save the people who had scorned him, generosity finds a whole new level of application.

It's not about following the rules... it's about following him.

Has that shift happened in you? The shift from obeying the rules of generosity, to following the God of all generosity? Do you feel inspired, more than you feel commanded?

2 Corinthians 9:6–9 (NLT): *6 Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. 7 You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. "For God loves a person who gives cheerfully." 8 And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others. 9 As the Scriptures say, "They share freely and give generously to the poor. Their good deeds will be remembered forever."*

Discussion

- What are some of the differences between giving that is modeled in the Old Testament versus in the New? How are they the same?
- How does the cross change our perspective on generosity?
- How can one make sure they are giving cheerfully, and not begrudgingly?
- How do the laws of the Old Testament shape this conversation, and how are they incomplete to guide us today?
- 2 Cor 9:6-9 (above) discusses God's provision for those who are generous. What do you think that means? What does is NOT mean?

Pray for each other