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Session 7



GLOBAL EDITION

EDITED BY: JASON FILETA



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Designed by Danny Palmer.

Session Seven

Justice and Generosity: Justice Will Cost You Something

“If our giving does not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say it is too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot because our commitment to giving excludes them.”

- C.S. Lewis

“It’s not how much we give but how much love we put into giving.”

- Mother Teresa

Definitions

Sacrificial Giving: Intentionally giving something that is precious or costly to you as an act of worship or devotion. Giving from our substance rather than abundance. Sacrificial giving is a choice to give up something that might bring you comfort or joy in order to give to others who are in need.

The Generosity of Heart to See Everyone by Daniel Solano Maldonado

One Sunday morning, some years ago, a few student friends and I decided to serve breakfast to homeless people in one of the most dangerous parts of the city. The police advised people to stay away from the area, but we felt directed by the Holy Spirit to go.

What we found shocked us. We saw people hungry, dirty and drunk. We found children drugged and unable to move. In the midst of the smell and chaos was a newborn baby. It was heartbreaking. A man came up to us. Initially, I was filled with fear and prejudice because he smelled of alcohol, was high on drugs and had wounds all over his body. We started talking, and I saw past what I saw on the surface. He began to tell me some of his story. He hadn't always been on the streets. He had once been part of a church; he had even been baptised. But a series of bad decisions and difficult circumstances had left living on the streets as his only option. We talked to other people, and they shared their pasts. We heard stories of rape, abuse and addiction.

It can sometimes be hard to see beyond the dirty hair and faces, beyond the smell, beyond the drunkenness. But every person living on the streets has a story. And each person is wonderfully and fearfully made in God's image and is loved by God.

This one encounter inspired me to do more than just give them money. The project grew into a team of up to eighteen people, taking breakfast at least once a month to people living on the streets, spending time with them and organising days out for them in the countryside.

When I see babies, children, young people and adults on the streets, I often think of myself, my brothers and sisters, my nieces and nephews. It could be one of us there, lying hungry, without hope. I think how merciful God has been to me, giving me shelter, food and a loving family. I want to be part God's work, and obedient to his call to reach out to the poor and broken. I want to help because God is worth every last penny of my money, and every last second of my time.

Combating Greed with Generosity

by Gaston Slanwa

In such an unequal world, the need for justice and generosity is greater than ever before. Generosity is also a clear biblical command.

A dictionary may define generosity as the quality of being kind and generous, but it is important to also understand that biblical generosity is the result of a transformed heart. We give because God loved us first and because we long to love, live and give as he did. We want to grab hold of 'life in all its fullness' (John 10:10), of which giving is an important part. We are told by Jesus himself that "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). By giving we are also able to help release the hold that money can create on our hearts. "Command those who are rich in this present world...to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share...so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life" (1 Timothy 6:17-19). We are told that our heart can't serve two masters, and by being generous with what God has given us we're able to release its hold on our lives and truly serve Him. "Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7).

In talking about justice and generosity, we need to think of the divide between rich and poor, and between the strong and the weak/vulnerable. We also need to think about greed. Today our world is extremely polarised by wealth and poverty. The rich/poor divide is not just one between nations but also within every nation and every community. Poverty from a biblical perspective is broken relationships: with God, with ourselves, with others, with our communities and with our environment. In seeking to be part of God's kingdom work, restoring these relationships - an outworking of justice and generosity has to play a central role.

The Bible is clear that God is against greed. While wealth is sometimes considered a blessing, there is also a clear responsibility to share

wealth with others. “Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share” (1 Timothy 6:18). And we should not lose sight of the spiritual danger that money poses, as Jesus taught, it is hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 19:24; see also Matthew 6:24, 1 Timothy 6:10 and Hebrews 13:5).

God is on the side of the poor. The writings of the prophets about how poor people should be treated, the ministry and teachings of Jesus regarding those who are poor and the attitude of the early church towards those in need, show how much God wants us to care and never turn our back on those who are poor and vulnerable. In his book “Generous Justice”, Timothy Keller expresses this in the following way:

While clearly Jesus was preaching the good news to all, he showed throughout his ministry the particular interest in the poor and the downtrodden that God has always had. Jesus, in his incarnation, “moved in” with the poor. He lived with, ate with, and associated with the socially ostracized (Matt 9:13).

And now, unlike any time in history, those who seek to follow Jesus need to be aware of the magnitude of the suffering and injustice in the world and to be real and effective instruments of justice in an unjust world.

Scripture shows that God hears the cries of those who are poor; delivers justice on their behalf; defends and protects them; is angry with those who abuse and oppress them; and identifies with them. God sets himself against those who practise injustice and are not generous toward those in need.

We have a clear call to give generously, following the pattern of our Master and Lord Jesus Christ, who gave everything in order that we can be saved and blessed. The opposite of the love of money is generosity. Instead of looking to take, we are invited to give, for there is always more joy in giving than receiving.

The need for justice and generosity in our world is immense. Christians will make a significant difference if we wake up to the understanding of the generous lives God wants us to live. We may not be directly responsible for all the evils and misery seen in the world, but our lack of commitment to do something about them does not make us less responsible. Justice and generosity will surely bring healing to our world. God is a just and generous God. Those who profess to be his children must seek to resemble him.

Read Isaiah 58:4-10 together

- 4 Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife,
and in striking each other with wicked fists.
You cannot fast as you do today
and expect your voice to be heard on high.
- 5 Is this the kind of fast I have chosen,
only a day for people to humble themselves?
Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed
and for lying in sackcloth and ashes?
Is that what you call a fast,
a day acceptable to the Lord?
- 6 Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:
to loose the chains of injustice
and untie the cords of the yoke,
to set the oppressed free
and break every yoke?
- 7 Is it not to share your food with the hungry
and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—
when you see the naked, to clothe them,
and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?
- 8 Then your light will break forth like the dawn,
and your healing will quickly appear;
then your righteousness will go before you,
and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.
- 9 Then you will call, and the Lord will answer;
you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.
If you do away with the yoke of oppression,
with the pointing finger and malicious talk,
- 10 and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the oppressed,
then your light will rise in the darkness,
and your night will become like the noonday.

Questions for Discussion

1. It is clear in Isaiah 58 that God wants us to “spend” ourselves; this means giving of ourselves. How do you define giving sacrificially?
2. What does the passage describe as the benefits of living generously?
3. Fasting is often considered a form of worship that shows great devotion. What does Isaiah 58 teach us about acts of justice as worship?
4. What is God saying to you, and what are you going to do about it?

Together

Generosity begins in our hearts. When we realize how God has been generous with us, it allows us to be generous towards others. As a group, make a list of the ways you have experienced God’s generosity. Examine the list and give thanks that we serve a generous, loving God.

Now, with that fresh on your minds practice generosity together. Here are two ideas, and we suggest you choose the one that best fits your community:

- Split off into pairs and take turns spending five minutes speaking words of love, affirmation and kindness to each other. Five minutes forces the “giver” in this exercise to really dwell on the qualities and character of their partner, and allows the “receiver” to experience the warmth and blessing of someone else’s generous heart. It may be culturally appropriate for women to be paired with women, and men with men
- Think of a project in your community you could give to collectively. We suggest you keep individual amounts given anonymous, and just report the collective amount

Solo Work

Examine your heart. What is holding you back from giving generously and sacrificially? Take a moment to pray and listen. It could be a trust issue, it could be a sense of ownership over your money and time, it could be a selfish desire to have more, etc. Write down the barriers you have to giving. How can you sacrificially and creatively give of yourself moving forward? Come up with one to three promises or ideas for your action plan related to giving more of yourself: your money, your time, and/or your energy. Continue to work on your creative expression.

Prayer

Lord, challenge me to be as generous as you are, to give freely of what I have, because everything I have has been given to me by you.

END

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