

CRSWLK

THIS
GENEROUS
LIFE

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Introduction

We all have this one life to live here on this earth. Regardless of what lies beyond the grave and into the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, we have this moment, this life, and we get to choose how we are going to live it! So what do you want that legacy to be? How has the world become a better place for you being in it?

This year, we are going to combine our Thanksgiving and Christmas series. We are bringing them together under the title:

“THIS GENEROUS LIFE”

Our hope is that during this season of thankfulness and hope, you will take the opportunity to re-envision what it means to live a life full of generosity and grace. To be generous is more than just what you give to others, although that is a part of it. It is really the attitude and the position that you take toward the world, toward others, toward those values that need to be supported, and even toward your family and friends. To be generous of spirit means to move toward the betterment of everything around you in all that you undertake.

It is not a simple decision to be generous. Whether it is being generous with your gratitude, like Hannah, or benevolence, like the Widow of Zarephath, or being generous with your finances like the Widow in Mark, generosity is something that we aspire to hold in our hearts and hands. Your willingness to engage in what it means to live a generous life will ultimately mean the releasing of some things, but often in order to receive other things that our generous God has for us.

The reason we are to be generous, of course, is that we serve an incredibly generous God. Any generosity that we have comes from his overwhelming outpouring of love and grace to us. As we begin to recognize this, or even just remember this truth, our lives begin to conform to the generosity that we have been shown. It is a continual loop in some respects, we give away to receive more so we can give more away.

When we begin to live this generosity loop, we lean into the values that God has placed in our hearts. In doing so, we are building that generosity momentum that carries on. The accretion of generosity in our lives never leads to less, rather, it leads to more and more and more, which seems counterintuitive, but is part of the paradoxical nature of God in general.

As we take this journey together toward the end of the year, I want you to think about a couple of things:

- How do you feel about giving?
- How much can you give?

I ask these questions because I want you to keep these in mind as we study over the next number of weeks. You may be a generous giver, but you might not have your heart in it. Or, you may wish to give but can't sort out what is a good place to start. We will deal with all of this throughout this series.

Lastly, as we are looking at the end of the year and beginning a new year directly after, I want you to think about the giving systems you have in your life, and if there is a possibility to revisit those systems and find a way to renew, refresh, or even recreate them in your life to create space for what God has for you.

I don't believe that God wants us to live our lives full of consumption, greed, and hoarding. I believe that God wants us to create space in our lives for what he wants to bless us with. Therefore, the way we look at what we give actually has a great impact on how we look at what we have.

So much more on this throughout the series.

But thank you for the way that you have generously given to Crosswalk over the years.

Pastor Tim.

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WEEK 1

Week 1 - A Life of Gratitude: Hannah

Overview

We begin our new sermon series by looking at the story of Hannah—a woman of incredible faith and generosity. Despite all odds, Hannah remained faithful to God. Through thick and thin, good times and bad, Hannah was committed to the Lord and expressed incredible trust in His mighty power. Before this story in scripture, we never see or hear God addressed by the title she gives Him, “the Lord Almighty.” In the end, God’s faithfulness and generosity to Hannah prompted an act of incredible generosity on her—a returning/giving back of her son, Samuel, to the Lord. We have lots to learn from this story so let’s jump right in.

Scripture

1 Samuel 1-2: 11

Open

The Sermon this week is going to focus on how God is faithful, and how we sometimes make promises to God. Hannah was seen as someone who was faithful to her promise and this was because of how grateful and generous she was because God kept the promise made to her.

Think about and share a time in your life when God has been faithful to you. When did you know that God fulfilled his promise?

Head

Read all or select portions of 1 Samuel 1–2:11 together and share any wisdom, insights, or questions in response to the reading.

Hannah’s generosity in this story is extreme but does this story remind you of anything in your life?

Would you give your child to God as Hannah did? What would that look like today?

Have you ever prayed for something you thought would never come? What did you do when it finally came?

Heart

Why do you think God was finally willing to grant Hannah her child? Did it have anything to do with what she promised God?

Did Samuel live up to the hopes that Hannah had for him?

What kind of blessing has God given to you? What do you think is the most generous thing you can give to God?

Why do you believe that Hannah was so generous?

How can you live in that generosity?

Hands

Have each person take a piece of paper and write one thing that they would give away to God. This is not a burden, but something that shows a generosity of spirit from the giver. When that is finished, put them all in a bowl and then see if you all can guess who is giving what to God according to the papers. Let them know this is the game before they start so they are not so specific in their giving that it would give them away too easily.

Ask the following questions:

- 1.What do you hold most dear to your heart?
- 2.Are you willing to give that to God?
- 3.If you prayed that you would give God something, what do you believe you would need to do to follow up on that promise?

Week 1 - (continued)

Living Words for Your Week

Today, pray for the promises that God has made to you as well as for the promises that you have made to God. As well, pray that you will recognize the generosity that God has shown to you, and live in the same sort of generosity of spirit that Hannah had.

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WEEK 2

Week 2 - A Life of Benevolence: The Widow of Zarephath

Overview

We serve a God of abundance, not scarcity. In our study this week we will be looking at the story of another woman with incredible faith—The Widow of Zarephath—and a God who gives generously. When Elijah came to this woman she had enough food to make one last meal and then she believed that would be the end. Elijah proclaimed God’s favor over her and her household and God supplied a seemingly never-ending supply of food. She was blessed so that she could be a blessing. This week we invite you to examine your life and see where that same thing is true for you!

Scripture

1 Kings 17:7-16

Open

The sermon this week leans into the idea that we should give first to God. This is a pretty consistent theme throughout scripture, that what we give to God should come before what we give to ourselves. The Bible calls these things the “first fruits” of what we make and harvest. And while this may seem greedy on God’s part, it is really a way to put things, especially money, into perspective.

When have you experienced this type of giving in your life? What was it like?

Head

Read 1 Kings 17:7-16 together and share any wisdom, insights, or questions in response to the reading.

Was there a reason that there was a drought in the land?

Why wouldn't Elijah have been exempt from this difficult time? Isn't he a Prophet of God?

Do you listen to what God would want you to do when times get difficult?

Do you do those things, even if they seem a bit strange?

The Bible is full of strange requests from God when things are difficult, can you name a few others?

Heart

What do you do when things get difficult? How do you lean on God in those times?

What does it mean to give the first fruits of what God has given you back to God?

How can you honor God in your giving?

Does honoring God in your giving take a modicum of trust on your part?

Hands

As you think about more practical applications from this conversation, ask these questions in your group:

Has there been a time when you were faithful in your giving to God when it was not honored?

Was there a time when you gave to God and there was not enough?

Living Words for Your Week

When you pray with your group today, pray for their finances and their capacity to give back to God what he has already given to them knowing that, as scripture says:

“Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.” Ephesians 3:20

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WEEK 3

Week 3 - A Life of Giving: The Widow

Overview

What happens when you give everything you have? We often give to the things we love, but we don't often give sacrificially. This widow had cultivated such a spirit of generosity in her life that she was able to give an amazing amount from what she had. Her generosity has become a model of what Christian generosity really is. While others have given more in quantity, she gave the most in quality.

Scripture

Mark 12:41-44
Luke 21:1-4

Open

Have you ever witnessed an act of true generosity? What did you see/hear and what impact did it have on you?

Head

Read Mark 12:41-44 and/or Luke 21:1-4 together and share any wisdom, insights, or questions in response to the reading.

Before we come to our verses today, Jesus gives a warning against the religious leaders of that day and exposes their selfish ways (vs.38-40). What is Jesus' point in contrasting their situation with that of the poor widow?

Jesus was a master of using modern-day examples to illustrate Kingdom principles. Why do you think he was watching people give money inside the temple? What would a modern-day equivalent of this story be?

Heart

Have you ever been tempted to make yourself or your actions seem to be better than they truly are? How do people use *religion* to make themselves look good?

What kind of faith did the widow have in order to give the way she did? How does the way you give reflect your faith?

Is there a "small" thing in your life (money, time, talent, love, other?) that could turn into a great thing if you were willing/able to give it away to God?

Hands

Have you ever "used" religion to get something for yourself (attention, respect, acceptance) rather than for the love of God? What helps you get back on track after a situation like that?

How can you be more intentional about giving? Does your giving come off the "top" (at the outset of the month) or from what is leftover (at the end of the month)?

Living Words for Your Week

"In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

Acts 20:35

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WEEK 4

Week 4 - A Life of Thanksgiving: David

Overview

David is an ongoing paradox as a spiritual leader and mentor for us. He had problems, made mistakes, was a bit loose with his morality at times; but he also became a hero of the faith for the way that he lived his life of gratitude with reckless abandon. He is a constant mixed bag of cautionary tales and models of how we should live our lives. How can we not fall into his pitfalls, but lean into his life of incredible gratitude for what God has done for us?

Scripture

2 Samuel 22:49-50; 1
Chronicles 29:12-13;
Psalm 118:21

Open

The story and life of David is well documented in the Scriptures. Is there a particular story, Psalm, or aspect of David that you identify with? Why?

Head

Read 2 Samuel 22: 47-51, 1 Chronicles 29: 10-15, and Psalm 118: 21 together and share any wisdom, insights, or questions in response to the reading especially in light of thankfulness..

God described David as a man after His own heart. In what ways do you think this can be seen in the life and Psalms of David?

Do you think David's praise and thanksgiving was dependent upon God answering his prayers? Explain.

What discipline do you think David practiced that helped him stay thankful and praise God even when life was difficult?

If "everything in the heavens and on the earth" belongs to God, what belongs to us?

How do verses 14-15 of 1 Chronicles help us lean into a regular attitude of gratitude?

Do you think David ever thanked God for answering prayer before it was answered? Or how about when he received an answer he didn't like or want?

Heart

Why do you think practicing thanksgiving is such an important part of your spiritual life/growth?

In the Psalms, David doesn't hold back when he is frustrated or upset about his perception of God's lack of activity, or a lack of justice, but he often comes back to a place of praise. How can we work to be more like David in this respect?

How does being thankful for what you have put you in a mood to share what you have with others?

What is one practice you could begin today that would help you live into a spirit of gratitude?

Hands

Loads of research talks about the mental and physical benefits of practicing a life of thankfulness; some suggest taking time to share three things you're thankful for at the end of each day. Why not start today? What are three things you're thankful for in your life today? How about three things you're thankful for about God?

Week 4 - (continued)

Living Words for Your Week

"Then I will praise God's name with singing, and I will honor him with thanksgiving."
Psalm 69: 30

“Always be joyful. Never stop praying. Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.”

1 Thessalonians 5: 16-18

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WEEK 5

Week 5 - A Life of Giving: Joseph

Overview

Joseph was someone who was willing to give so much away. He gave his reputation, his direction in life, his hometown, and even his ability to parent away at times. Having the Son of God as a step-son must have been a constant exercise in giving away all that was expected of him as a father and a Jewish man in the community at the time. Simply by agreeing to give away his standing and marry Mary was an act of giving that most of us will never do. Taking a look at the little we know about him is a wonderful way to remember what God has done for us.

Scripture

Matthew 1:18-25

Open

What do you know about your parents' courtship or relationship "origin" story? Did you ever learn why or how they came to choose your name? What does it mean??

What can we surmise about the faith of Joseph from this story? What does this reveal about his relationship with God and his trust in Him? How does your faith compare/contrast with his?

Head

Read Matthew 1:18-25 together and share any wisdom, insights, or questions in response to the reading.

Have you ever tried to put yourself in the shoes (experience) of Joseph and Mary? What do you think Joseph may have been thinking or feeling? What about Mary?

How do you think this origin story would have strengthened or strained Joseph and Mary's relationship and future together?

What is the most striking thing to you about this story? What do you learn about faith and generosity from it?

Hands

Although it was a difficult task—Joseph obeyed. This role came with lots of potential challenges and trials, but Joseph believed in faith and didn't rationalize away his dreams. He moved forward in faith, believed, and obeyed. What lessons can we learn from Joseph that help us in our lives today?

How can this group pray for you today?

Living Words for Your Week

"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign; The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."
Isaiah 7:14

Heart

Why do you think Joseph may have been afraid to take Mary as his wife? What would people in that day/age have thought about him?

We are told in verse 19 that Joseph had a plan. He "had in mind" to divorce Mary and that was considered a "righteous" action on his part. Why do you think that was?

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WEEK 6

Week 6 - A Life of Giving: Mary

Overview

Service as a way of life is a generosity that few dream about when they are young. There are certain people in Scripture and history that have modeled this to us in profound ways. Mary is one of those. She gave up everything in order to serve God and her fellow man by carrying and caring for the Son of God incarnated here on earth. Did she know that this one decision would change the trajectory of her life? And do we know that deciding to give service to God will change ours?

Scripture

Isaiah 62:1-5; Psalm 96:1-2, 2-3, 7-8, 9-10 1 Corinthians 12:4-11
John 2:1-11

Open

Is there a person in your life who you think about when you think of someone who dedicated themselves to serving others? Who and why?

Head

Read Luke 1: 26-38 together and share any wisdom, insights, or questions in response to the reading.

What do you think it was about Mary that made her favored with God prior to her becoming the mother of Jesus?

In verse 34, how does Mary respond to the angel's news? Do you think Mary doubted the angel or herself or both?

Mary accepts the angel's message, but do you think she understood it all? What can we learn about a life of service from this angel encounter?

Read John 2: 1-11 together and share any wisdom, insights, or questions in response to the reading especially as it relates to Mary.

Think about where Mary was and what Mary must have been doing to know about the wine shortage, not to mention how she went to Jesus to fix the problem. What does this story teach us about living a life in the spirit of service to others?

Jesus made enough wine to fill over 700

bottles of wine in our understanding today.

Why so much at the end of the celebration?

Read 1 Corinthians 12: 4-11 and share any wisdom, insights, or questions in response to the reading.

According to verses 6 and 7, who is God working in and what kind of people are given gifts?

What is the purpose of those gifts?

Heart

Jesus, prompted by Mary, gave abundantly. What do we learn about how we serve by watching Mary and Jesus at the wedding?

It has been said that our lives begin to have a point when we are no longer the point of our lives. How do you think our life of service impacts us as we are impacting others?

The apostle Paul tells us that God loves a cheerful giver. The same is true when we serve joyfully. How can you and I serve at church, in our homes, in our communities, with joy?

Have you ever studied your spiritual gifts or had them affirmed? What gifts do you think you have and how do you use those gifts to bless others?

Week 6 - (continued)

Hands

Think of a way that you can be of service to three different groups in the next week; those in your home/family, those in your neighborhood/community, those in your church/workplace. What is something you can do for the people in those areas to meet a need and be a blessing?

Living Words for Your Week

*“Don’t be selfish; don’t try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don’t look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. **7** Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being.”*

Philippians 2: 3-7

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Week 7 - A Life of Presence: Holy Spirit

Overview

Let us not be confused, our God is an incredibly generous God. We see this by God's willingness to be with us through the Holy Spirit. God the father is transcendent, and God the Son was temporal while here. The Holy Spirit, is the generous presence of God in every aspect of our lives, forever. we are not only blessed by this generosity, it should inform our generous presence in the lives of those around us.

Scripture

1 Corinthians 3:16; 2; Corinthians 6:16;
Ezekiel 36:27; 2 Isaiah 63:11

Open

In what area of your life are you most generous? Are you generous with your time? Your treasure (money)? Your talents?? What do you have a hard time being generous with? Why is that?

Head

Read 1 Corinthians 3:16; 2; Ezekiel 36:27; 2 Corinthians 6:16; and Isaiah 63:11 together and share any wisdom, insights, or questions in response to the reading.

As you reflect on these passages, what do you see as the primary role of the Holy Spirit in our lives?

How do you see the Holy Spirit helping you in your life as a follower of Jesus? Do you see the Spirit's role as instrumental or less involved?

What is one way that the Spirit has been generous to you?

Heart

What does it mean that our bodies are the "dwelling place" or "temple" of God? How should we care for this *temple*? Are there things in life that could easily defile our temples?

As you think about what God promised to Israel in Eze. 36, what shape is your heart in right now? Have you experienced any of these promises in your own life (cleansing,

heart transplant, power to obey)?

Hands

In what ways have you noticed the Holy Spirit moving in your life this past year? How can you give credit or acknowledge that work as you move forward into a new year?

What can you do each day/week to become more open to the teaching and guiding of the Holy Spirit in your life?

How can this group pray for you?

Living Words for Your Week

"May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."

2 Corinthians 13:13

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WEEK 8

Week 8 - A Life of Incarnation, the greatest sacrifice: *JESUS*

Overview

What is there to say? There is no greater love than giving one's life for another. This is the story of Jesus, coming from very far to become love and generosity for us in tangible ways. Without this particular decision, we would never be who we are, never have the hope, the grace, and trajectory that God has given us through Jesus. When we talk about "this generous life", it is truly the life of Jesus that we are really talking about. If we can have even an iota of the generosity that God has shown us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we will not only be content, but we will be a blessing to those around us. And through that blessing and generosity, people will meet Jesus.

Scripture

Isaiah 9:6

John 1:29

Matthew 1:18-25

John 1:14

Matthew 2:1-12

Open

What is one of your favorite Christmas traditions and why?

Head

Read Isaiah 9: 6-7 together and share anything that jumps out at you in particular about this passage..

If this was the only passage you had telling of the coming Messiah, what would you know and think about him?

Read Matthew 1: 18-25 and John 1: 14 together and share any wisdom or insights as you read this passage.

Do you think Joseph had no doubts about what was happening, or about himself, after this dream?

Up to this point, the Word was heard, spoken, but not seen. How does the Word becoming flesh change how we can now see God?

The Word that became flesh is the God who is with us. How do you see these two ideas tied together?

Read Matthew 2: 1-12 together and share any wisdom or insights you have as you read.

What does it say that the people that were most open to receive the Messiah were foreigners and shepherds, not those who had been studying the text and watching for his arrival?

How did God help Mary and Joseph prepare for their coming trip to Egypt to escape Herod (see verse 11)?

Jesus was born to die (John 1: 29), and his every breath was leading him to the cross. Those alive in these times had no idea what the Messiah was really here to do, but we know. How does knowing the end of the story change how we celebrate the beginning?

Heart

Jesus asked us to love as He loved us (John 13: 34-35). Knowing that he left heaven to come to earth to live and die, what does it look like for us to love like Him today?

To incarnate is to embody in the flesh. How do we “embody” the life of Christ in our lives and in our church today?

Week 8 - (continued)

Hands

If the birth of Jesus, the incarnation, was one of the most powerful and tangible ways God showed us His love, what is a way that you could honor and thank him today by incarnate the birth of Jesus story for someone else and showing them love?

Living Words for Your Week

“For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.”

John 3: 16-17

“So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.”

John 13: 34-35

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