

LIVING
IT OUT

DAILY BIBLE STUDY

CEDARCREEKCHURCH

You're Wealthy. Here's Why:

If you won the lottery, what would you do with the money?

No matter the group of people with which you discuss this question, you'll likely see a trend.

"I'd give (a certain amount) to my (kids, parents), and a certain amount to you guys (those in present company). Of course, I'd give (a certain amount) to a charity, and then I'd pay off debt, buy a bigger house," and on and on it would go.

The hypothetical lottery winner usually gives a response at least close to the one above.

What's interesting is that the answer to the question usually begins with *giving*. It's as if the answerer decides that **when** he becomes rich, he'll **then** be able to bless those around him significantly.

If we're honest, we'd admit that this is how many of us live currently, regardless of whether we're thinking about winning the lottery or not. We might tell ourselves, *"I'd love to be more generous to people, but I want to make more money (or have more resources/time) first."*

As Ben Snyder pointed out this weekend, this is thinking about generosity backward. Instead, we can know that **when we realize God is generous, we discover that we are wealthy.**

Notice that our recognition of God's generosity is what shows us that we are - in fact - wealthy. It is not the amount of money, possessions, or anything else that determines our wealth. No, wealth is determined by something far greater - by God's generosity.

When you think about who God is, does the word *generous* come to mind? It's normal for most to think of things like *all-knowing, all-powerful, all-good*, but generous? Of course, we wouldn't deny that God is generous, but it doesn't seem to be one of the first descriptors that comes to mind.

However, when we think about God and what he has done by sending his Son to die for our sins, the word generous perfectly describes who he is. When, as Ben pointed out, we understand God's generosity and reflect on what he has done *for* us, we'll discover that we have more than any lottery winner could ever have.

This past weekend, Ben walked us through a passage from the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy. The Israelites were about to enter into the land God had promised them, but before they did, God gave them instructions.

This is where we find ourselves in the 26th chapter.

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

¹“When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you as a special possession and you have conquered it and settled there, ²put some of the first produce from each crop you harvest into a basket and bring it to the designated place of worship—the place the Lord your God chooses for his name to be honored. ³Go to the priest in charge at that time and say to him, ‘With this gift I acknowledge to the Lord your God that I have entered the land he swore to our ancestors he would give us.’ ⁴The priest will then take the basket from your hand and set it before the altar of the Lord your God.

⁵“You must then say in the presence of the Lord your God, ‘My ancestor Jacob was a wandering Aramean who went to live as a foreigner in Egypt. His family arrived few in number, but in Egypt they became a large and mighty nation. ⁶When the Egyptians oppressed and humiliated us by making us their slaves, ⁷we cried out to the Lord, the God of our ancestors. He heard our cries and saw our hardship, toil, and oppression. ⁸So the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand and powerful arm, with overwhelming terror, and with miraculous signs and wonders. ⁹He brought us to this place and gave us this land flowing with milk and honey! ¹⁰And now, O Lord, I have brought you the first portion of the harvest you have given me from the ground.’ Then place the produce before the Lord your God, and bow to the ground in worship before him. ¹¹Afterward you may go and celebrate because of all the good things the Lord your God has given to you and your household. Remember to include the Levites and the foreigners living among you in the celebration.

God tells the Israelites that the first thing to do after receiving his gift of land would be to give up the *first* portion of that gift.

Why did God do this?

He probably had many reasons, one of which was so they could see what God had given them.

When we realize God’s generosity, we **see** what we have been **given**. The blessings in our lives are from God. He is the generous giver.

What are the God-given gifts in your life right now? List them.

As they are offering their gift, God tells the Israelites to “say in the presence of the Lord your God,” what many scholars believe to be an old Israelite creed designed to remember what God had done for them. Creeds were designed to be easily remembered and easily repeated. This creed included memories of the Exodus and the journey to the land God promised them.

As Ben said, when we discover we are wealthy because of God’s generosity, we **cherish** significant moments in our **past**.

How have you experienced God’s generosity in your past? Take some time to write out fond memories of God’s generosity.

The passage ends with another command from God, mainly, “Afterward you may go and celebrate because of all the good things the Lord your God has given to you and your household. Remember to include the Levites and the foreigners living among you in the celebration.”

When we discover God’s generosity in both our past and our present, we **celebrate** and **share it** with others.

The Levites and the foreigners were people that had no allotment of land. So, God, in his incredible generosity, asked his people to share what they had with those who didn’t have as much.

No matter your circumstance, no matter the amount of material "wealth" you might possess, you have an over-abundance of wealth because the Supreme God of the universe has blessed you with his grace time and time again. While we were still sinners and enemies of God, he loved us and blessed us out of his generosity (Romans 5:8). This is the incredible, all-surpassing, infinitely-rich generosity of God.

What can you do today to celebrate the generosity of God?

With whom do you need to share this message?

Prayer:

Gracious and merciful heavenly Father, thank you for your generosity. I know that I am blessed beyond measure, though sometimes I forget. You have given

me an abundance of wealth, and I always want to remember that. Help me to see, cherish, celebrate, and share the wealth you have given me. I pray this in the name of Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit, amen.

This post was written by Andy Rectenwald, the Director of the LivingItOut Bible Study,

How to be Generous Like You Are During Halloween:

Tuesday, July 25, 2017.

As we all know, during Halloween, candy is the highlight for kids. A lot of neighborhoods participate in a trick-or-treat night. Neighbors provide buckets and buckets of candy for little Supermen and Cinderellas. Although the price of candy has gone up, people still seem to buy a lot for the occasion, not because they love candy, but because they love giving to children and watching the excitement light up on their face.

In the same way, we as Christians should be excited and ready to share and give to others every day. In 2 Corinthians 8:1, the Apostle Paul writes,

*¹Now I want you to know, dear brothers and sisters, what God in his kindness has done through the churches in Macedonia. ²They are being tested by many troubles, and they are very poor. **But they are also filled with abundant joy, which has overflowed in rich generosity.***

While the people of Macedonia endure challenges and poverty, they still find overflowing joy in their generosity for others. We can have this too.

In verse 3-5, Paul writes,

For I can testify that they gave not only what they could afford, but far more. And they did it of their own free will. ⁴They begged us again and again for the privilege of sharing in the gift for the believers in Jerusalem. ⁵They even did more than we had hoped, for their first action was to give themselves to the Lord and to us, just as God wanted them to do.

Not only did the people give all that they could physically afford, but they gave more. They gave themselves to the Lord, his people, and his work. They gave from their hearts out of pure joy.

⁶So we have urged Titus, who encouraged your giving in the first place, to return to you and encourage you to finish this ministry of giving. ⁷Since you excel in so many ways—in your faith, your gifted speakers, your knowledge, your enthusiasm, and your love from us—I want you to excel also in this gracious act of giving.

While we can be excellent in our work, we are also called to be excellent in giving; giving our time, our talents, and our resources.

⁸I am not commanding you to do this. But I am testing how genuine your love is by comparing it with the eagerness of the other churches. ⁹You know the generous grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty he could make you rich.”

Here, Paul connects God's generosity in giving up his richness in heaven to live on earth in poverty. The second person of the Trinity became a man to suffer and die. God, the all-powerful creator of the universe, suffered and died for us. That's generosity.

Our generosity reflects our faith and our character. Being ready and willing to give proves our trust in God, who was willing to give it all. Just as easy as it is to give candy away on Halloween, it should be easy and fun to be willing to give anything else we have to others.

How do you feel when you give freely and joyfully to others?

What is something you can give to someone else this week? (A meal, money for groceries, a car ride, etc.)

Prayer: God, thank you so much for the resources you have blessed me with. Help me to give to others that I come in contact with joyfully. Help me to be a blessing.

This post was written by Rachel Marroquin, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut Bible Study.

What is Mercy and How do I Give it?

Wednesday, July 26, 2017.

When you hear the word “generous,” what do you think?

Ephesians 2:4-8 is one of the most powerful examples of God's generosity. These verses explain God's ultimate, and free, gift to every one of us – the gift of salvation. Salvation sets Christianity apart from every other religion. It is offered to us without conditions, without prejudice, and without a cost to the recipient. God's generosity begins and ends with the gospel.

This passage starts off with "God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much." We might define mercy as showing compassion to those whom we could harm. In the passage, Paul describes God as "rich in mercy." No one else has more power to punish or harm us than God and yet God chooses to show us mercy. There are no conditions set on God's love. God shows us an unconditional love that our human limits can hardly fathom. God's love is not contingent on our actions, or reciprocating his love. God loves us. Period.

We are reminded of our present condition, sin. Charles Spurgeon [said](#),

If man be lost by sin, how can he be saved except through the grace of God? If he has sinned, he is condemned; and how can he, of himself, reverse that condemnation? Suppose that he should keep the law all the rest of his life, he will then only have done what he was always bound to have done, and he will still be an unprofitable servant. What is to become of the past? How can old sins be blotted out? According to Scripture, and according to common sense, salvation can only be through the free favour of God.

Salvation is not a tally of the wrongs and rights in your life. It cannot be earned through good works. We can never do enough good to eliminate our past sins. But the good news is we don't have to. Ephesians is clear that salvation is a gift. It is not by our own efforts. It is not something we can try to achieve or accomplish, but rather a gift we must believe in and accept.

Unfortunately, it is easy to fall into three common traps when it comes to the issue of salvation: **legalism**, **pride**, and **misery**.

The trap of **legalism** tells you that you have to do all the right things to *earn* God's favor. Ephesians 2:8 is clear that belief is what saves you, and not actions.

The trap of **pride** tells you that you have earned God's favor because you're such a good person. This thinking is also faulty in assuming your present and future actions are enough to eliminate your past sins.

The third trap, and perhaps the most dangerous is the trap of **misery**, which tells you that you could never be loved by God. The Devil loves to spread this lie, and it is so easily believed. He preys on all your guilt and insecurities. Thankfully, Ephesians 2:4 says that God loves you and he is rich in mercy. There is no room to argue. You are enough; you just have to allow God into your life.

Ephesians 2:4-8

⁴But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, ⁵that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!) ⁶For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. ⁷So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus. ⁸God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God.

How does the salvation promised in Ephesians differ from the teachings of other world religions?

Why can it be hard to accept the gift of salvation? What do you need to give up, or what beliefs do you need to change, to believe in the grace God is offering you?

If you are already a Christ-follower, take this week to memorize Ephesians 2:4-8. Reflect on how these verses can help you fight against legalism, pride, and misery. Write down what trap you fall into and how Ephesians can keep you away from it.

If you are ready to accept God's gift to you, pray this prayer:

Dear God, I am not perfect. I cannot save myself from my sins, but I believe you can save me. Please forgive me of my sins. Thank you for sending your son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross for me. I am ready to accept your gift of salvation. Amen.

Here's What You Can do Today to Be Generous:

Thursday, July 27, 2017

Is there anyone in your life that you would die for? Your spouse? Your children? It's an easy thing to say when we love someone, but if your loved one's life was really on the line, would you be able to step in and take the bullet before it hit someone else?

Well, that is exactly what Jesus did for us by giving the ultimate gift of his life.

1 John 3:16

"We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters."

While we may never have to decide whether to step in front of a bus to save someone else, we are asked to give up our lives daily (Luke 9:23). We "deny ourselves" by putting the needs of others ahead of our own desires. We lift them up instead of tearing them down. We die to the things of this world so others can feel what it means to have life in Christ.

The generosity of Jesus and his willingness to give all of himself for all of us, even after we have turned away from him time and time again, sets the example for our lives. Jesus gave a practical example of how we can do that every day when he said, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34-35).

So how can we love one another? For the people we know well and with whom we have close relationships, we should learn to speak their love language (to know more about this, check out the series: [The Space Between Us](#)). For example, my wife's love language is physical touch. I can say the words, "I love you" all day long, and she will know that I do, but if I never give her a hug or a kiss, she won't feel loved. Jesus' death encompassed all five love languages. He surrendered his life (time), he gave us access to God (gifts), he laid down his life so we wouldn't have to (acts of service), he sent the Holy Spirit to be with us when he went to heaven (physical touch), and he promised to be with us to the end of the age (words of affirmation).

Showing love to people we don't know as well can be more difficult because we don't know where to start. A simple "Hello" and a genuine "How are you today?" can make a huge difference in someone's life. I see this every day working at Chick-fil-A. We strive to provide exceptional customer service, and that comes

from a genuine desire to serve others. Personally, I see *every* interaction as an opportunity to make someone feel better about themselves than before they walked into the restaurant.

In the [What Makes You Happy](#) series, Ben talked about the physical and mental benefits of volunteering, which is a great way to serve people we don't know yet. It is one thing to do nice things for others, but it is quite another to do them out of our love for God. It is by that love that others will know we love him, and that we love them. People will remark about how different our lives are and wonder aloud why we choose to be nice to them. This opens the door to speak of our love for Jesus.

With a simple Google search, it is easy to find thousands of ways to serve others, but some practical suggestions that I have experienced include:

Taking food to a new neighbor (or a new mother);

Inviting another family over for dinner, especially if they have children;

Letting people borrow your stuff (everything from a cup of sugar to your car);

Pick up the check at a restaurant, or pay for the person behind you in the drive-thru line;

Writing an encouraging note to a co-worker;

Giving someone a hug;

Getting involved in the church or a local ministry.

The list goes on and on, but I encourage you to find new ways to be generous with your time, money, and energy. If you need ideas on how to do that, read Romans 12 as an example of how we should live, how we can use our gifts to serve, and how we can love even the most difficult people to love.

Prayer: *God, teach me to be generous, not just with my money, but with my time. I want to show people that my love for you is real, and that begins with loving them. Thank you that you loved me so much to give your son's life for me. Show me how to give my life for others.*

What to Do When Nothing is Going Your Way.

Friday, July 28, 2017

“God is generous.”

It's a pretty straightforward message, but for some, it may be hard to believe. Maybe hearing those three words made you feel cynical rather than joyful, because there are things you want – even things you need – that God hasn't given you. Maybe you're struggling to feel wealthy right now with rent, debt, or hospital bills piling up.

“Sure,” you think. “God is generous sometimes, or toward some people. But he's not generous to everyone all the time.”

If he was, you wouldn't be struggling like this, right?

Not quite.

God is generous at all times to all people. He offers us everything we need by offering himself, because he is all we need. He did this by giving up his life so that we might have salvation and a relationship with him. This is a gift, which he freely offers to everyone at all times.

However, that doesn't mean he'll always give us the worldly things we want or need.

It's a hard truth to swallow, and an even harder truth to explain; why doesn't God always answer our prayers the way we want him to? Why doesn't he always heal our physical, mental, or financial ills? Why doesn't he fix everything for his followers?

Obviously, that's a bit too big of a question to answer in one short devotional. However, one reason that God doesn't answer some of our prayers is that he wants something better for us.

You've probably heard that too many times, to the point that it's become trite. But in reality, this can be one of the hardest lessons for a Christian to learn, because sometimes, God doesn't give us the things we desperately want to remind us that all we need is him. Sometimes God doesn't give us the things we need so that we'll learn to place our trust not in ourselves, but in him.

Again, it's a hard lesson. But God doesn't want believers who only trust him when things are going well. He wants believers whose faith runs deep – who trust in

him even when things aren't going their way. He wants believers who understand they're wealthy even when they lack earthly wealth.

God wants believers like Habakkuk.

The book of Habakkuk is very short, and I recommend reading all three chapters to understand what is going on fully. However, the short story is that the Israelites were heading into some dark days, and Habakkuk knew it. He knew things were bad, and he knew God wasn't going to answer his prayer for things to improve. In fact, Habakkuk knew things were going to get much worse before they got better. But by the end of the book, Habakkuk says, no matter how bad things get, "I will rejoice in the Lord!" (Habakkuk 3:19).

How?

How does Habakkuk rejoice, even when he's about to lose everything?

How are we supposed to feel wealthy even when we lack earthly wealth, whether it be in the form of financial stability, good health, or safety?

Habakkuk rejoices because he knows that earthly wealth is fleeting, but God is not.

In the book of Habakkuk, God tells Habakkuk how the very people who were about to conquer the Israelites would eventually lose everything: "But soon their captives will taunt them. They will mock them, saying, 'What sorrow awaits you thieves! Now you will get what you deserve!'" (Habakkuk 2:6).

However, no matter what happens, no one can steal God from us, nor can anyone steal us from God. He is ours, and we are his.

So, we place our trust in him and rejoice, even when times are hard, because we know we have a treasure more valuable than anything in this world.

And nobody can take that away from us.

Prayer: *God, help me to know that you're generous even when things aren't going the way that I'd like. Give me a robust faith like Habakkuk. I want to depend on you for all things. I ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.*

This post was written by Payton Lechner, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut Bible Study.