

Generosity

SCOTT HOEZEE

At one point in John Steinbeck's classic novel, *The Grapes of Wrath*, the character of Ma Joad makes an interesting point. Her impoverished family had recently received some generous help from some folks who frankly were not much better off than the Joad family, and this leads Ma Joad to observe that if ever you need help, don't go to rich folks; they won't give you anything. Go to the poor; that is where you will get help. Now, here is something we are familiar with: the image of the stingy miser, whether it is Ebenezer Scrooge or some other figure, the wealthy are sometimes not nearly as generous as those less well off. Well, generosity is an important virtue in the Bible too, and today on *Groundwork*, we are going to ponder why. Stay tuned.

DARRELL DELANEY

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, this is episode four of six in a series on some of the virtues extolled in the New Testament. We are focusing on virtues that are not part of the nine fruit of the Spirit; not part of that triplet of faith, hope and love; but these are other ones. We have covered already compassion, humility, and gratitude. Still to come are programs on truthfulness and forgiveness; but this fourth program: generosity.

DARRELL DELANEY

Compassion: being able to suffer with someone who is suffering—not more known is empathy and mercy; humility: thinking not of yourself higher than you ought to be, but looking at yourself under the authority of Christ and embodying that; and then gratitude: also giving God thanks and praise for everything you are and everything you have, because every good and perfect gift comes from above; and we are looking forward to jumping into the definition of generosity today.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; a good, common-sense definition. So, what is the opposite of a generous person? A stingy person. The opposite of generosity is stinginess; but being generous means a number of things: It means not spending a lot of time calculating how little you can get away with, but handing stuff out freely without the fear that you are overdoing it, right? Being generous is not tipping your restaurant server precisely 15%, but start there, and then go up over the top a little bit. Generous people round numbers up, not down. The generous do not aim ever and only to do the minimum, but they like to tilt toward the maximum.

DARRELL DELANEY

And they do it in a posture that does not say: Hey, look at what I have done. They do it in a way that is kind of secretive...kind of like, well, don't let anybody know this happened; this is between me and you; and the idea is to be a person who *freely* gives.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Your saying that just now made me jump back two programs in this series to humility. We are generous in humble ways. It is a humble generosity, not a "look at me" generosity; it is a humble generosity; and again,

we tilt toward the maximum. A generous cook, for instance, doesn't make barely enough food to cover the basics... In fact, a friend of mine mentioned that he had an aunt who always prepared too little food, and then when the meal was over, she would always be so happy that there were no leftovers: Oh, I made just enough again, she would say; but all of the diners around her table ended stopping at McDonald's on the way home because they were still starving to death...I mean...you never get enough to eat at her house. On the other extreme, though, I can remember a woman...she was actually the grandmother of some of my cousins, and she loved doling out lots of food. I mean, she would ask you if you wanted a scoop of ice cream with the apple pie and if you said no, you got one scoop; if you said, yes, you would take a scoop, you got two; and it went on and on and on like that. She loved doing it.

DARRELL DELANEY

Actually, in my extended family, that is how they do meals. The measurement of my eyes was off when I first got married because it was just me and my wife; and she is like: Why are you making all this food? It is because I was raised in a family where...not that everything was abundant...but they had portions that were larger because her heart was like: I cannot give you everything, but I can give this meal and I can give you a full belly; and her heart was one of generosity; and that is the kind of family I grew up in.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And you know, we often think of people like that. Generous people are joyful people; and indeed, you know, if you think of generous people you know, Darrell, they are cheerful. They kind of have a zest for life, and they share that zest and that joy with others. Jesus had that; I mean, all the feeding miracles in the gospels show that.

DARRELL DELANEY

Well, we have one here in Mark Chapter 6: ³⁵By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. "This is a remote place," they said, "and it's already very late. ³⁶Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." ³⁷But (then) he answered, "You give them something to eat." They said to him, "That would take more than half a year's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?" ³⁸"How many loaves do you have?" he asked. "Go and see." When they found out, they said, "Five—and two fish."

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, at this point I wouldn't say necessarily that the disciples were being stingy, but neither were they feeling very generous. In fact, they are all about doing calculations here. They calculate how much money it would take to buy food for such a big crowd, and they conclude: Nah, we don't want to do that. Send them away. Then they calculate what they've got: five loaves, two fish; not enough. Calculation, calculation, calculation. Let's do the minimum here, Jesus. Get rid of them. Jesus had other ideas. The story continues.

³⁹Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. ⁴¹Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he (Jesus) gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. ⁴²They all ate and were satisfied, ⁴³and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. ⁴⁴The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.

So, Jesus overshot a little.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, he did. I was thinking about how you were saying the disciples were calculating. If we think about that, I think that a calculating life can be an exhausting one, because you are always worried about if we are going to have enough. This whole scarcity mentality is challenging when we serve a God who is abundant, and in this passage, he shows that he is abundant by giving them twelve baskets left over of food, showing that blessings are plentiful; from God they are.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it brought joy. In fact, we miss it in the English translation, but when Mark 6 twice says that they sat down in *groups*, the Greek word there that Mark used was *symposia*; and a symposia was a party with lots of food and wine and laughter and joy. So, Jesus' generosity led to a joyful party on those feeding miracles. But you know, Darrell, all those feeding stories...they are symbolic of the Lord's Supper, but really, the whole of our salvation. I mean, what does it mean that we are saved by grace alone? It means our God in Christ is generous.

DARRELL DELANEY

And in fact, Paul picks that up in the book of Titus when he talks about the generosity of Christ. He says: ^{3:3}At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. ⁴But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷so that being justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We are saved by grace, Paul says in Ephesians 2; we are saved also by the kindness of God, and he says that here, too, in Titus 3. But the kindness that disposes God to be gracious to us despite our sins, it is all served up to us because, as Paul wrote to Titus, God is generous. He generously pours out the Holy Spirit that gives us rebirth and renewal. God is generous; Jesus is generous; he calls us to be generous as well. As we saw in Mark 6, God doesn't dole out the Holy Spirit with an eyedropper. Jesus didn't dole out the bread and the fish with an eyedropper, doing just the minimum, you know, to keep people from starving. He went over the top; he overshot and he created a meal with abundant leftovers. That is how God is. He is generous when he pours out his Spirit on us. But we have more to say on generosity, and we are going to say it in just a minute. So, stay tuned.

Segment 2

DARRELL DELANEY

I am Darrell Delaney, with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We just said that we are saved by grace, but we are also saved by the generosity of God; and Darrell, all throughout the Bible, our being generous is something that God looks for in God's people. We are created in the image of God, so we are always looking for ways to be godlike in our own generous living.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, generosity calls us to go above and beyond the call of duty; and if we do that, we are taking a page from our Father, because in Ephesians 2, it says: God, who is rich in mercy, he gave it to us when we were still sinners, and that is the actual grace that we have been saved by. So, the idea that it goes above and beyond is actually the character of God that we are supposed to display.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we get that already in the Old Testament, actually. So, let's listen to Psalm 37: ²¹The wicked borrow and do not repay, but the righteous give generously; ²²those the Lord blesses will inherit the land, but those he curses will be destroyed. ²³The Lord makes firm the steps of the one who delights in him; ²⁴though he may stumble, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with his hand. ²⁵I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread. ²⁶They are always generous and lend freely; their children will be a blessing.

DARRELL DELANEY

And then, there are also passages in Proverbs, from Chapter 11 and Chapter 22, that say that: ^{11:23}The desire of the righteous ends only in good, but the hope of the wicked only in wrath. ²⁴One person gives freely, (there it is again) yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. ²⁵A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.

^{22:9}The generous will themselves be blessed, for they share their food with the poor.

So, the character of the generosity of the person they are talking about in scripture is one who has an open hand; because if you think about it, a closed hand cannot do anything because it is so busy holding onto something...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

It cannot transfer things; it cannot give things; it cannot receive more things; and so, if you are a generous person, you will help the people and be a blessing to the people around you, which actually harkens back to Chapter 12 of Genesis, where Abraham is told he will be a blessing.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and both the Psalm passages...from Psalm 37 we just looked and those two from Proverbs 11 and Proverbs 22...they say that, you know, there is a paradox...there is an unexpected outcome here. People who give away more, end up having more than the stingy.

DARRELL DELANEY

Huh.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, I mean, how does that go, right? The more you give, the more you get. It is kind of a divine switcheroo. Kind of a reverse logic. Those who give generously receive more; and they don't just do it for that, though, right? I mean, if you give so that you will get more, well then, you are not really being generous, you are being self-serving. So, *true* generosity just comes from the heart; and if at the end of the day, it turns out that God blesses you even more than the stingy person, well, that is a bonus.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think it can be said that good, generous behavior will beget generous behavior. So, if I am being generous to some person, they may want to pay it forward to someone else...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

Even if I don't get that back, that is fine; but the idea is that we are spreading good around, like Acts 10:38 tells to us do: Go around doing good as Jesus did. So, the idea is to be generous and live that lifestyle of generosity, and you will see what God can do with a whole community of folks when you do that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I like that pay it forward idea. I mean, I have had, I don't know if you have had...I have had a time or two when I am going through the drive-through window for Starbucks to get some coffee in the morning, and then I pull up and I've got my credit card or my money, and the person says: The person in the car ahead of you bought your coffee for you...

DARRELL DELANEY

I love that!

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, the first time that happened to me, it was like, well, I want to do that for somebody someday. It won't be that person, but...and then I did it, and you just drive away and imagine the smile you leave behind. It creates good momentum. Speaking of good momentum, I think it was interesting those Psalms and Proverbs passages to note, too, that generous people birth generous children. Their children will be a blessing, right? So, we know...like in Jeremiah 31 there is that famous passage of the parents have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge; so, the father eats a sour grape and the kid's face puckers...bad generational momentum; but there is good generational momentum, too. That is a good thing. The generosity of one generation inspires the next; but Darrell, there are also passages that say this is just simply the right way to live. One of them is in 2 Corinthians 9.

DARRELL DELANEY

Picking up at verse 6, it says: Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. ⁷Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. ⁹As it is written: "They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever." ¹⁰Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, that is interesting; then he goes on. Now, we are in verse 12: The service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. ¹³Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. ¹⁴And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. ¹⁵Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

Wow! What a lot in these verses here, Darrell. So much stuff going on: echoes of Proverbs and Psalms, when you sow generously, you will reap generously. It is like this law of spiritual physics: the more you give, somehow, the more you get. But I also like the connection Paul makes there, Darrell, that when we are generous, other people find more reasons to praise God!

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; and when you are a cheerful giver...I love that word *cheerful*...in the Greek it is where we get our word *hilarious*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, people are really smiling. You can see the smiles on their faces when they are giving; and it is not because they are going to get something back, it is because they enjoy the intrinsic value of being a blessing; and that is contagious. I would hope that that would be more contagious than any pandemic that we ever have; that we would actually be generous; and that would beget more generosity in our world. It actually is the principle, too, from Galatians 6, where you will reap what you sow is what he says.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, if you sow generosity, you will reap generosity around you.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I like the image of a contagion or almost like a pandemic—a pandemic of generosity. It just keeps spreading around and leading to more things. The more we give generously, the more people praise God for us; the more praise God for the grace he has given us, the more, Paul says, their hearts will go out to *you*. The whole passage there of 2 Corinthians 9 just kind of fizzes and bubbles over with God's generosity feeding our generosity; and that in turn makes the people around us happier...hilarious...and that is such a strong witness to the gospel that people praise God. It is just a classic case of good momentum all over the place.

DARRELL DELANEY

And it is really a beautiful thing to see; but in just a moment, as we close out this program, we will wonder practically how we can nurture this in our everyday lives. So, stay tuned.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Darrell, let's begin this final part of this program on Christlike...Godlike...generosity with this passage from 1 Timothy 6:17: Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. ¹⁸Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. ¹⁹In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

DARRELL DELANEY

Paul is not just saying to be generous with money...with cash...or with their resources, but he is saying to be rich in good deeds. I love that part of the scripture, Scott.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; share your money, of course; share your materials things, of course; but far better, share your very selves, and do it generously, you know; be generous with yourself. Exude goodness in ways that have nothing to do with your bank account, really, right?

As we wonder here in closing here, how all of us...regardless of how much money or possessions we have...how all of us could be more generous, I think is a good place to start. Generosity is not just about giving away money or giving to charity or putting some money in the offering plate at church. I mean, it is about all of that, too, but it is more.

DARRELL DELANEY

I am so glad that you said it is not about money in the offering plate. I think some people simply resolve that we wrote a check and that is good; and that is good, but actually, it would be more valuable if you got involved; if you were able to go on the mission trip or if you were able to help the neighbor; if you were able to do some practical things. Actually, time is worth more than money. If you want to spend time helping people, I think that God would be honored by that as well.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I remember the deacons of my church used to talk about tithing, and they tithed time, talent and treasure...treasure last. Time and talent; be present; lend a hand, as you said; volunteer; listen to those who are in pain; sit quietly with the person who is going through a tough season, and do it without looking at your watch every few minutes, wondering when you can get up and leave and go do something else. We give the gift of our very selves, and Darrell, that gift of time...giving generously of our time...that is a real challenge in a hyper-busy society like the US.

DARRELL DELANEY

I have heard so many times so many people say: Time is money; but if they were to trade that and understand that...okay, if I said to you: I will give you a million dollars, but then I say: You have to die tomorrow. You are going to understand that time is infinitely more valuable than money. And so, what I want people to understand is that if we spend time, that is the greatest gift, because we cannot get it back. So, spending time with people and letting them know that they are worth your time, that is the most valuable gift you can give. Jesus gave the ministry of presence. I think you said that once before in a different episode.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; everybody is in a hurry these days, you know; we put our coffee in the microwave, put 45 seconds on and we sit there tapping our toes: Come on; hurry up, microwave; heat my coffee. We erupt in anger at the pokey driver in the car ahead of us, even though probably he is just going to make us 30 seconds later to something, right? I mean, who cares? But we are in a hurry. So, generosity, I think, means being willing to slow down, take it easy, give our time to somebody who needs us; make time to visit the lonely person; make time to run up to the hospital; go to the funeral home, or attend the funeral. You know, it is interesting, Darrell, somebody noted to me that back in the day, when somebody in the church died, basically the whole church came to the funeral. How often do you see that now?

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

People bomb in and out of the funeral home: There, I saw them; but boy, an hour-and-a-half...two hours...to go to a funeral? I don't have the time. So, funerals get sparsely attended, but maybe the generous need to carve out the time.

DARRELL DELANEY

It's a beautiful thing that you are connecting time with generosity. So, I can give the gift of spending time with people to show them that they matter to me, and that is an expression of generosity. Paul said that we not only gave you the gospel, but we gave you our lives as well. So, he was really interested in making sure they knew that they were worth the time; and he was displaying the love that Christ had told him to display to these people around him, just being a blessing.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You know, we could also be generous with our time, but also just be generous with our kind words. It is interesting, Darrell, that these virtues that we are covering in this six-part *Groundwork* series, they kind of overlap a little bit. So, this is going to be, I think, the third time in four programs that we are going to say generosity is generous with our words in how we treat the checkout clerk in the grocery checkout line. They wear a name ID badge for a reason. Use it. Make eye contact with them. Thank them as they hand you the receipt. Same with servers at restaurants or flight attendants on airplanes; appliance people who come to fix the fridge. Generous people are kind people who treat folks like that with respect.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think one of the things that I have been doing is I like to study names, and if I see someone with a name badge on and I know, I say: Do you know what your name means? And I tell them what their name means, and I say: Hey, that is my gift to you. Now, live out your name. You know, if your name is Nick, it means victorious, live a victorious life. We will pray that God will give you victory. Just being able to speak life to people is just some gratitude gift that I can give to them. Hopefully, it makes their day; and I am just trying to be a blessing. So, you know, if you are able to use that in your life, or you know, there may be things that you do to make you feel like I just want to be a blessing to folks, and that is the essence of generosity.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And don't be surprised when you do that, if people's faces light up; because, you know, you talk to people in the service industry, Darrell...clerks and the like...and waiters in restaurants...servers...they will tell you how often they get treated rudely.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, I used to work retail; I know...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Oh, man! People won't even make eye contact with them; they certainly don't bother to look at their name or use their name or thank them. So, you know, I remember when I did it one time at the grocery store. The person who bagged up my groceries, I said: Thanks, Andrea; and she was like: Whoa; you used my name. People never do that. It is like, why not? It is right on your name badge. But, you know, not to do that, and to be rude, is every bit as being stingy as people who won't give a dime away either.

Also, Darrell, lastly, we don't want to get ahead of ourselves. The last virtue we are going to look at in this series is forgiveness, but we already noted that we have been forgiven by God because of his generous kindness that disposes God toward grace toward us, and we should be generous in that sense, too. We all have people who have wronged us. Generous people are forgiving people. We are supposed to be chips off of the divine block and bearing the image of our generous God, and we can do that by dealing graciously with each other.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think that it is very clear that if we don't know how to be generous, we can literally ask God. In James 1 it says: ⁵If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

So, if you want to be generous, and you don't know how to be generous, you can say: God, give me the wisdom on how to be generous in a way that pleases you and honors your name and serves the people you called me to serve. We can do that, and he will help us to be more generous, thanks be to God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Darrell Delaney. Join us again next time as we learn about the Christlike virtue of truthfulness. Connect with us at groundworkonline.com to share what *Groundwork* means to you, and say what you maybe would like to hear discussed next on *Groundwork*.

DARRELL DELANEY

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