

A Generous God
Generous Series: Week 1
October 23, 2016

Welcome/intro/vision: thanks for serving last week at Chatham Serves, had a great Sunday of making a difference right here in our community

If you're new picked a great week to join us we're going to start a brand new series called Generous

And to start with this week, I want you to consider someone in your life who has impacted your life through their generosity.

And by generosity, we're talking very broadly:

it could have been a coach or a teacher who was generous with their time and invested in you

it could have been a boss or a co-worker who was generous with his or her skill set and really taught you how to do your job well

it could have been your parents who were generous financially to help pay your way through college or get your marriage off to a great start

it could have been someone who was generous with their relational networks and who helped you to find a new job

it could have been someone who was generous in how they served you—moms, thanks for how generous you are in your serving, and forgive us for how we take you for granted sometimes!

Can you think of someone in your life who at some point has behaved generously towards you?

For me, growing up as a kid, my dad was very generous with his words. He was constantly looking for the good and calling it out.

A great, great, great encourager who didn't hold back telling me that he loved me and was proud of me over and over and over again

What kind of impact do you think that had on me? HUGE! Totally life-changing.

I don't think I'll ever really know how much his planting of generous words into my soul from the very beginning of my life has shaped me and blessed me and will for my whole life

If someone came up to you and said, "Would you like two more generous-hearted people in your life," how many of you would take them up on that offer?

If we had the choice, we'd ALL LOVE to have more generous-hearted people in our lives!

I want to suggest to you: everything that's good, right, beautiful, thoughtful, well-done, and wonderful in the world

has come as a result of one or more people being generous with their time, money, skillsets, creativity, passions, energies, ideas, and love

You don't have to be a God person or a Jesus person to see that ***generous people change individual lives and generous people change the world.***

So we love generous people, we'd all love to have more generous people in our lives
BUT when we look inside of us, most of us have these obstacles to us becoming generous people, don't we?

We've got hang-ups, fears—what if there's not enough? What if people don't appreciate how I'm trying to be generous? What if people take advantage of me?

Or perhaps we're just so much inside of our own heads and our own problems
Such that we're not even able to look up and look around and ask the question "how might I be generous here?"

Generous people change lives of the people all around them and generous people change the world

And so, for these next five weeks, we're going to drill down into how following Jesus frees us to be generous people.

Because here's a historical fact: Jesus-followers have unleashed more generosity into our world than just about any people group in history, ever.

Jesus-followers have built more hospitals and fed more hungry and cared for more orphans and widows, started more non-profits and given more money to meet the needs of the world than just about any other people-group in all of history.

As people have followed Jesus over the past 2,000 years it has unleashed unprecedented generosity all over the globe

Generous people don't just change the lives of the people in their immediate vicinity, they also have changed and are still changing the world.

So how do we become the type of people that the world desperately needs and that we personally wish we had more of in our lives? That's what we're doing these next few weeks.

And to start this series this morning, I want us to look at the whole of the Biblical story through this lens of generosity.

Because here's what we believe is true: ***God's generosity frees us to live generously.***

If God is generous, we're free to not be stuck in a fearful, anxious, fretful life. If God is generous with his resources, it frees us up to be generous with ours as well

And if God ISN'T generous, then we would be wise to be careful and cautious about how generous we should be.

So we're going to do a quick overview of the whole biblical story, hitting just a few key points as a kind of outline of the biblical story

If you're new to faith or new to church, here's the whole thing in a nutshell. If this is familiar to you, I want to invite you to look at it through this lens of generosity

And let's start in the very beginning, it's a very good place to start. Genesis 1—there's a whole lot of layers of things happening in Genesis 1

But for now, I want to suggest that the core of what's happening in these first two chapters of ***Genesis is that the writer is trying to answer a couple of the biggest and most important questions in the universe:***

1. ***Who or what is God?*** What's God like? What's God's essential character?
2. ***Who are human beings?*** What's our name, what's our identity?
3. ***What are we here for?*** What's our purpose or the meaning of our lives?

And in the first verses of Genesis 1, you've got God speaking words and life springs forth everywhere—wonderful, spectacular life!

it's all being created from nothing by this exuberant and joyful God who declares it is good! It is good! It is good! Over and over and over again!

And then we get to the creation of men and women and here's how the writer describes it in Genesis 1:26:

26 Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

27 So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

28 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."...³¹ God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.

And then in Genesis 2, we get a little more:

8 Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. 9 The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food.

In answer to the single biggest question in the cosmos of “**who is God?**” The writer of Genesis paints in these first chapters a relentlessly consistent answer: **God is a all-powerful, creative, and generous, giving God.**

GIVING is at the heart of generosity and it is all over this creation story!

God creates this dizzyingly wondrous and complex and beautiful and good creation: every time he speaks, something beautiful and wonderful and good is made!

Then he makes human begins in his image, he GIVES something of himself. He gives to humanity a stamp of his nature and his character.

And when it’s all set up and all ready as Genesis 2 says, he puts humans made in his image in paradise

God makes humans for beauty and places them generously in a place that is beautiful and the key word here is ENJOY!!! Enjoy the beauty! Enjoy the great food! Enjoy me! Enjoy each other! Have lots of sex!

There’s just ONE tree that I want you to stay away from and it’s this tree over here, but everything else is yours to ENJOY

And he not only places us in this beautiful place to enjoy it, which would be wonderful enough-- God GIVES it to us,

tells us to have dominion and authority and to RULE over this place as people made in his image, to be good stewards of this thing that he has made exactly for us.

In my small group a week ago one of the guys in the group that I’m getting to know shared how he did some wood-working. So I asked him if he had a project that he was most proud of

And he said that the project that came to mind was the time when he pulled a Christmas Eve all nighter to build a table to GIVE to his little girl on Christmas morning!

God has worked for 5 days making and crafting and creating this wonderfully beautiful world in order to GIVE it to humanity!

What do we learn about God from the very beginning? That he’s a generous giver, mighty, creative, powerful

Now of course you just have to look over your Facebook newsfeed to know that paradise has been lost

And if the first 2 chapters of Genesis answer the key questions of Who is God and who are we and why are we here?

The **3rd chapter of Genesis** answers the core question of “**what’s gone wrong?**”

Again, so many levels of things happening here that we'll come back to in a few months, but here's what Genesis says has gone wrong from Genesis 3:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

² The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden,³ but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

⁴ "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. ⁵ "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Okay, so take a look at this story and what's the core lie that the serpent is telling Eve?

That God is holding out on you. That there are good things out there for you but God's selfishly holding them back from you

The core of the temptation whereby in the Biblical story humanity forfeited perfect paradise was that we did not believe that God was generous.

Doubting God's generosity and believing the lie that God was holding out on us is how we got into the mess that we're in

My friends, ***at the core of every single thing that the Bible describes as temptation is this exact same lie: that God is not a generous God***

Every single temptation and every single sin, has, at its roots, this lie that in order for me to get what I really want, I have to reach for it myself on my own terms and in my own way because God is not a generous God

Many years ago I was living in Richmond doing campus ministry with college students and I was in a stretch where the ministry wasn't going super-well and I was discouraged and frustrated

And one day during this season of frustration and discouragement I went on a hike to spend a couple of hours with the Lord—I was going to pray and read Scripture and just ask God to help me

And as I was walking through this path in the woods, for the first whole 30 minutes or so, I couldn't shake these voices in my head that I was doing a stupid job that I should just quit this low-paying, exhausting, student ministry work and go find a real job that paid better and that was less emotionally and relationally intense

And whenever I tried to answer those angry voices with the voice of reason that I had felt like God had called me to this place and had done things to clearly affirm that this was where I was supposed to be

those angry voices declared that, 'well, God doesn't seem to be showing up now' and started adding up all the hours I was working and all the money I wasn't making and all the headaches and heartaches that I was experiencing

And I started dreaming of a bigger house and a nicer car and all the things that I DIDN'T have because of what I was doing

And this went on and on, like I said for like 30 minutes as I walked this trail, I could not shake these voices that were telling me all that I was missing out on by doing what I knew God wanted me to do

And then at one point as I'm doing this battle I walked past a couple of guys who were working on this trail for the county, cleaning it up and doing some work on it

And they called out to me and said, "Heads up! We just killed a huge copperhead here in the grass beside the trail"

And I realized that the voice that I was fighting was the exact same voice of the serpent that Eve heard here, the same core lie that the serpent spoke to Eve: God's not generous. You can't trust him. He's holding out on you.

Oh my friends, if you don't hear anything else, hear this this morning: at the core of every single temptation is the lie that God is not generous and that he's not being generous towards you.

And if we're going to take following this God seriously, we're going to have to learn how to recognize that lie and see right through it.

Eve and then Adam who's with her, both believe this lie in spite of all the evidence to the contrary. And the world's been a wreck ever since.

Our whole world and the whole cosmos was made to run on the knowledge of and trust in the good and generous God.

Every time we disbelieve that, every time we act in any other way, we give up more and more of the life that God designed us for.

Eve believes the lie that God is not generous, introduces sin into the world, and at that point, the road forks for God and he has a choice to make

God can either do some form of abandoning or destroying this world he's just so beautifully created

OR he can continue to act in accordance with the nature of God that we've seen so far in the first couple of chapters in Genesis: he can continue to GIVE generously—and this is what he does!

God starts with giving all the nations the nation of Israel to be a light to the nations, to bless all the other nations and show them the glory of God

And then, at just the right time, God the Father sends the Son Jesus to do what only God can do: give himself up for the whole world

Jesus explained it this way to a guy who was asking him questions about who he was and what he was up to:

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. -John 3:16

God so loved the world that he did what? He GAVE. He gave his Son, his only Son.

The generous love that was poured out in the creation of the world is poured out again for the final redemption of the world

He is so generous, in fact, that when faced with the choice of letting us live apart from God forever or rescuing us and redeeming us at great cost to himself

God chooses the generous, self-giving, sacrificial option

Later in the New Testament, the apostle Paul describes the generosity of God this way:

⁹ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. -2 Cor. 8

The Son was with God before he put on flesh and became a man. He was rich! Had everything he could ever want or need. And yet for our sake, he gave all that up so that we might share in his riches—that's a generous God

Elsewhere Paul says it this way:

³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? -Romans 8:32

There's that word again, GAVE! God didn't even spare his own son, he GAVE him up for us, and because we have seen that wonderfully generous act, we can trust that he will give us much lesser things!

We are here to declare the wonders of what the generous, self-giving God has done for us in Christ.

That when we forfeited paradise by doubting his generosity, he again proves his generosity in how he pursues us.

He sends his son to a miserable death on a cross, a perfect sacrifice to cleanse us of all of our doubts and to conquer the spiritual forces that we've submitted ourselves to

In order that we might live in the freedom of the knowledge of the generous God, so that we might be spiritually rich, emotionally rich
and in order that we might be free to be generous, too.

And in the final great chapters of the Bible, Jesus has died and rose again, and one of his followers named John is in jail, one of the last of the original 12 followers

And John gets a vision—and parts of it are very confusing and we're not exactly sure what he's talking about

but parts of it are glimpses of what God will do at the end of all time, God's plan goal for all of creation:

Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away...

³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!"

-Rev. 21

The God we're worshipping and studying here today, kicked all things off with a generous creation, and the goal, the whole point of it all, is that he might be generous into eternity forever and ever to his kids that he loves

The generosity of God carries all of Biblical and redemptive history, from beginning to its wonderful, perfect, glorious end, forever and ever

And we're invited in to be a part of it.

God is a generous God. If we do not know that, if we don't believe it, it's going to be easy to get hung up when he calls us to be generous.

God is a generous God, at the core of his character is this generous, giving spirit and characteristic.

If you have not yet rolled back the curse in your own life and if you have not yet given yourself over to this generous God

and in particular if you haven't yet entrusted yourself to the generous gift of Christ's death on your behalf

then hear this morning is an opportunity for you to fight back the curse and come alive to God and all his mercy and generosity by entering into what God has done for us in Christ.

The whole of the biblical story and all of God's work throughout history is driven by the generosity of God, a God who delights to be generous to his people over and over and over again

And do you know who's image you and I are made in? God's!

You and I are made in God's image, not only to enjoy his generosity towards us to be find joy in being generous towards one another

Do you know why generous people change lives and change the world? Because when we're being generous, we're acting and behaving in line with who God made us to be!

We're expressing rightly what it means to be made in his image and to rule and exercise our authority in keeping with how he made us

Do you know why it can bring us so much joy to be generous? Because when God's generous, it brings HIM joy, too!

When God creates, when God redeems, when God finally makes all things new, do you know what it brings him? JOY! Immense Joy! This is Good! This is Great! This is VERY GOOD!

Mom, dad, you know that feeling you get when you've gotten your kid the perfect present that you know they'll love? There's a joy in that!

Sometimes I'm more excited for Christmas morning than they are!

God, who is a joyfully generous giver, has wired up the universe and wired you and I up in his image to experience the joy of giving generously, too.

God has made you to be generous, just like he is. And then he has blessed you with some resource or resources that he wants you to be generous with

God resources us with a variety of things in order that from our own pool of resources we might generously and freely given them away

Often in church contexts we talk about our key resources as time, talents, and treasure. Because church people like alliteration!

God has given you and I time, talents, and/or treasure, different amounts of each for each of us, we'll talk more about that next week—God has resourced each of us individually with different amounts of each of these

And then God calls us to organize ourselves into communities called churches and to share from the resources God has given to us

And the work of the church is to pool a bunch of our resources together—skills, gifts, money, talents, abilities, knowledge, resources

In order that we might work together to point one another to a generous God

And so that we might invite all of our neighbors towards a generous God the God who one day will wipe away every tear and will make all things new

We are here as Chatham Community church to bless and serve each other.

And we are here as Chatham Community Church to bless and serve this map.

Our mission here is to worship a generous God and in so doing become generous people so that we as a church might be as generous as we possibly can be to as many as we possibly can be in order that all people might know the wonders of this generous God.

He's given us these three resources of time, talents, and treasure in order that we might know the joy of being generous with them and in order that we might be a part of his generous mission of making all things new together

We mentioned earlier the historical fact: Jesus-following people have started more non-profits and more service and justice and relief efforts and educational institutions than any other people group in the world

This is because we believe in and we're following a generous God

But here's the flip side.

There's enough of us who love Jesus just here in this country, that if just the Jesus people were seriously committed to following this generous God we could totally change this place

We could tutor all the kids who needed tutoring. We could adopt all the kids who needed a home.

We could feed all the people who needed feeding in this country and if we were really generous we could probably figure it out for most of the world.

If just the Jesus-followers were more consistently generous in keeping with who God is and how God made us, we could change this whole world

Because God is a generous giver it is safe to give. Because God is a generous giver and has made us in his image, it is a joy to give

Because we have doubted God's generosity, our world is a mess and we fall into temptation and sin over and over again.

And because our God is a generous giver, he has generously given his Son to redeem all things and then God has generously given us resources that we might individually and together be a part of his mission to make all things new

And so this morning, as we close, here's your **Take-WITH's**: 2 Wildly Important Take-Homes for you to pray about and/or do:

1. *Is your understanding of God have at the center of it that he's generous?*

This is mission-critical: if you don't think your boss likes you very much, it's going to affect your work

If you don't think God is generous, it's going to hinder your own freedom to be generous, too.

If you're hung up on a God who is not generous in his love towards us, I want to invite you to look back over and pray over some of the passages we read today.

We've also got a great book on the book table called "The Good and Beautiful God: Falling in Love with the God Jesus Knew"

2. *Do a resource inventory & then do one intentionally generous thing this week.*

This week, I want you to do a little inventory—somewhere in your life, God has given you resources that you were made to share:

It could be a talent like baking cookies, it could be a gift of hospitality, it could be that you've got plenty of money, it could be that you've got more house than you have people living in it, it could be an extra car

it could be that you know how to fix broken things, it could be that you know how to teach math, it could be that you're good at speaking words of affirmation to someone who you know needs it

it could be that you've got great friends and relational networks, it could be that you're just a good listener

You have been resourced by a generous God with resources in some sphere, in some area of your life, go ahead and do a quick mental inventory of where you've been well-resourced

And from whatever resources God's given you, I want you to do something intentionally generous this week. Something practical and specific, leaning into the character of God and who God has made you to be.

We're doing one intentionally generous thing this week because

We are here as a church to worship a Generous God, and as we worship that God we are becoming generous people

so that we might together be as generous as we possibly can to one another and to our neighbors all across our community, so that all people might know and join us in worshipping this gloriously generous God.

PRAY

Transition into communion: we historically have done communion only on the first Sunday of each month, but in June we sent out a church-wide survey and several folks asked if we could do communion more often

So on months where there are five Sundays, we're planning on offering communion one extra time during the month, thanks for your helpful feedback!

And communion is a perfect way for us to celebrate the generosity of God, because here it is in meal form.

When we were far from God, and when we were a people who consistently doubted his generosity, he proves it to us in sending his Son to rescue us, to redeem us from ourselves and from sin and death

And he does this at great cost to himself. On the night he was betrayed....

Cool bread option today—feel free to celebrate God's generosity by taking a hunk off that bread! Crackers are there, too, those are gluten free.