

The Means for Generosity
Advent 2022 - Week 3
Deuteronomy 24:19-22
12/11/22

Introduction

Recap. Well we are in week 3 of 4 of our Advent Series - Give like God. Where we're taking this season of Advent to explore how God's generosity towards us makes us into generous people.

- **Week 1** - We began with the question "Who is Your God?" And we talked about how Jesus gives us two options - we can either worship God or we can worship money. And we talked about how the invitation to worship God is so much more rich and compelling because He is the one who gives us true identity and security in Christ.
- **Week 2** - We addressed the heart behind generosity. That learning to be cheerful givers, as the Scriptures say God loves, starts with recognizing that everything I have doesn't belong to me, but rather belongs to God - so giving is not a wearisome duty but a worshipful delight.

And this week, out of that idea that everything belongs to God and not to us and we are to worship Him in and through our finances, I want to talk about **the means for generosity**.

How do we actually put a desire for generosity into practice? How do we turn desire into action?

Deuteronomy 24:19-22.

I've gotta spend a little bit of time helping us understand what's taking place in the passage and then I promise stick with me, I'll land it with some really helpful application at the end, alright?

Explain Passage

Deuteronomy 24:19-22

19 "When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. 20 When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over them again. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. 21 When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not strip it afterward. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. 22 You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this.

GLEANNING

In Deut 24 we are in the middle of God giving His people, the Israelites, what is known as *The Law*. It's all of these sort of governing procedures about how they are to live as His set apart and holy people.

And what God is commanding the Israelites to do here in Deuteronomy 19, is to change the way they would do an ancient agrarian process known as **gleaning**.

You see, in a lot of ancient cultures, such as the one of the Israelites this is written to, **land and crops** were essentially the same as **money and capital**. Which meant if you owned land, and crops were growing successfully in that land, you were probably doing pretty well financially. Maybe extremely wealthy, maybe not, but at least doing well enough to have some degree of financial stability.

And what you would do, during the harvest season each year, is you would go out to your fields and you would glean, or gather, what you had worked to grow. Now, in that society, their tools weren't quite as sophisticated as what we have in modern farming today.

Lindsay's extended family are wheat and corn farmers in Texas. It's crazy. You can literally set the tractor on a GPS and it'll do all the work of harvesting grain for you while you sit and read a book in the air conditioned cabin. It's wild. Like a roomba for corn. Not how it was back then.

Back then, workers would go through and either by hand or with a tool pulled by oxen would gather up all of what they needed - whether that be grain or olives or grapes or something else. And chances are you'd miss quite a bit the first time, so you'd go back again a 2nd time, and often a 3rd and a 4th - as many times as it took to make sure you left nothing out in the field but harvested every last bit so there was nothing left on the tree or the vine.

But God comes along and says - Ok, Israel - I want you to do this differently than every other nation around you. Counter cultural discipleship.

Rather than going back out time and time again to maximize your intake, I don't even want you to go back out a second time. **Gather what you can in one trip, and then leave the rest out there and don't go back for it at all.** Even if you already bundled the wheat together and forgot to take it with you into the barn, leave it.

- This practice is what is taking place if you remember back in the story of Ruth. Boaz intentionally leaves behind grain for this group of widows, including Ruth and Naomi, to come gather from.
- We see Jesus and His disciples benefitting from this practice in Matthew 12, as they're walking through grainfields on the sabbath, plucking up and eating some of the stalks of grain.

It's reworded in Leviticus 19, where God says this...

9 "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. 10 And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the Lord your God.

So God commands the Israelites - don't gather as much as you possibly can. In fact, intentionally gather less than you can **SO THAT YOU CAN** leave the rest for those who need it, these vulnerable populations such as – **the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow.**

How to Read + Apply God's Laws

Now, this is a wonderfully applicable command to us today as Modern, Western followers of Jesus, if we understand how to read this text.

It's my experience that within the church, there can be some confusion around what we are supposed to do as NT Christians, followers of Jesus on this side of the cross when it comes to these OT commands - *The Law of God*.

- Do they still apply today?
- How literally do they still apply today?
- Why does it seem like we're supposed to follow some of them but not all of them?
- Why do these matter if the gospel is true - if we're not under the law but under grace - why do I care about this passage and what it says?

So let me try to help us out.

When it comes to reading and applying the OT commands, or laws, of God, it's important to remember 3 things.

1. The law of God can be broken into 3 categories - Civil, Ceremonial, and Moral.

- **Civil** – governed the nation of Israel as a Theocracy. Principles still apply today.
- **Ceremonial** – governed Israelite worship - different today post-Jesus.
- **Moral** – overarching laws of holiness still applicable today.

For instance, **Leviticus 19:27-28** says, **27 “Do not trim off the hair on your temples or trim your beards. 28 Do not cut your bodies for the dead, and do not mark your skin with tattoos. I am the Lord.”**

Well dang. I shave my head and my face and I've got tattoos. And I'm a pastor. Am I in trouble? Well no. This is a **ceremonial law**. The pagan nations around Israel would do all of those things as parts of their worship to their false gods. So God says - when you worship me, that's not a part of it. Your worship should be set apart as wholly different to me.

2. Jesus summarizes the whole law in two statements - love God and love your neighbor (Matt 22)

At its core, God's Law is a law of love. Everything God commands his people to do or not do has its end goal that they would be a people who more and more love God, and more and more love others.

3. Jesus came, not to abolish God's Law, but to fulfill God's Law (Matt 5:17).

The law was how the Israelites by faith would live as God's people and be right with Him. And Jesus says - I've come not to get rid of that, but to fulfill it.

Which means – everything God gave His people in the Law is both followed perfectly by Jesus and also completed in Jesus - and because He lived the law perfectly, by faith in Him His perfect obedience is now transferred to us and counts as our perfect obedience if we trust in Him.

So what does all of that mean for how we read and apply Deuteronomy 24:19-22?

It means this - that while this law (as a civil law for the Israelites) might not have bearing on our society as a whole today - we don't have to vote into law a new practice of how to harvest grain - it's direction of love for God and love for neighbor still applies to us today as a principle. A principle completely and totally fulfilled by Jesus even as He empowers us to live into it today.

Application into our Lives - Financial MARGIN

SO then - what is that principle and how do we apply it?

Here's how I would summarize what this command calls us to today in 2022 as followers of Jesus – **There are things God has given to you that were never meant for you.**

There is some amount of financial provision that God has blessed you with - some large and some small - that was never actually meant for you but was meant to be redirected by you to the needs of others.

And just like the Israelites are told to set aside some of their crops, leave behind some of their harvest for the sake of those in need, we too are called to **sacrificially** (at great cost to ourselves) and **intentionally** (not as we are able, but for this very purpose) leave behind some of our income as set apart for those who are in need around us.

We don't glean the very last drop of our financial harvest. In the economy of God's Kingdom, where our view of our possessions changes based on love for God and love for neighbor, perhaps the call of Jesus would be to not spend, save, or invest every last dollar we make on ourselves.

But this is going to be hard for us. And here's why...We're not very good at living with margin. We're not very good at leaving space on the edges, at leaving excess and not using up everything we have.

I think this is really noticeable in our **time** - we don't know how to live with or create margin in our schedules. We've believed the lie that busy means important so we are constantly hurried and rushing from one thing to the next to the next.

But I also think we don't know how to live with or create margin in our finances. In our budgets.

Here's what I mean – just like the man or family that goes and collects every last grape off the vine, we too push our incomes to its absolute limits. It's something all of us are drawn to, and susceptible to, and even told to do as the best way to live.

- \$900/mo in rent? Great, \$900/mo place.
- \$10k car? Great, \$10k car.

We default to pushing our income to its absolute limits. We raise our spending and standard of living to match our level of income.

In fact, I would argue the reason why, as we said week 1, the average American has over \$16k of *consumer credit card debt*, is because we not only push our income to its absolute limits, but we want to push it past its limits. We don't just make sure to get all of our olives off the trees, we go and borrow someone else's olives at a reasonable 20% rate!

This is not just my anecdotal evidence, this is actually an entire psychological concept – it's called **"lifestyle creep" – when an individual's standard of living increases as their income increases and former luxuries become new necessities.**

Increase. I've seen this play out firsthand in my own life. When Lindsay and I first got married, we were both full time seminary students and living off of 2 very part time ministry incomes. And we made it work. To say things were tight was a bit of an understatement. I can tell you stories later. But God took care of us and we were ok.

Then, a few years into marriage, we both graduated and got full time jobs. With salaries. Our income doubled in like a month. And I remember at first being like - this is awesome! And then a few months in, you know what I would find myself thinking - "We don't have enough money for everything we need."

But here's the thing - even though it might've felt like that statement was true, it wasn't at all. That was a *factually inaccurate* statement. I know because 6 months earlier we were living off of half and had everything we needed. So what happened?

Our standard of living had changed (well specifically mine because I'm the one who spends money in our family). What I thought I needed had changed. It had increased alongside of our income.

I had decided that certain things were needed that weren't in reality. I had added certain things into my life because I now had the margin to, and instead of keeping the margin, I filled up the margin with *wants*, and then as time passed I had begun to operate as if those things were not *wants*, but *needs*. As if they were "must-haves" instead of just "could-haves." Does that make sense?

I would be willing to bet that there are things like that for a lot of us.

I bet there are things right now in our regular monthly expenses that we have convinced ourselves are *needs*, and they actually are *wants*.

- Maybe for you it's the latte on the way to work each morning.
- Maybe it's having to have a subscription to Netflix, and Disney plus, and AppleTV+, and Hulu, and Amazon Prime.
- Maybe it's eating out for lunch every day.
- Maybe it's a certain brand of clothing.
- Maybe, hypothetically for some of us in the room, it's another pair of black jeans (hypothetically not from personal experience at all).

It doesn't have to be a bad thing at all, it might just be something you started purchasing at one point because you could, and then at some point it went from a "could-have" to a "must-have", and now it's difficult to imagine life without it.

And doing that *can* be harmless. I think God gives good gifts and things for us to spend our money on to enjoy, don't mishear me - none of those things in and of themselves are bad to spend money on.

The danger comes when lifestyle creep prevents generosity.

Because here's what so often happens – when we've pushed our income to its absolute limits, and an opportunity for generosity comes up – like giving to our 2022 Christmas Missions Offering, where 100% of what is given goes to see the gospel spread outside of these 4 walls – our response in those moments is often to conclude that we just *can't*. We look at our budget, and because we have pushed our income to its absolute limits *already*, our budget really does seem to tell us we can't afford to be generous.

But all that's happened is that we've set our budget up or handled our money in a way that *prevents us* from being generous.

In other words, it's not that we can't afford to be generous. It's that we can't afford to live the way we're currently living and also be generous.

And those are actually two very different things.

Generosity when we have excess to give is easy. Generosity when we feel like we don't, that is much harder.

Let me show you what this looks like:

House Projects. I was talking to a member at our church this week about this week's sermon, and for the past few months he's been telling me about house projects that him and his wife were excited to tackle in their new home. They were trying to be good stewards of their money, so much so that they specifically allocated all of their fluid savings account to the last dollar to specific projects to make sure they didn't overspend and all of that.

But they were both convicted by the Holy Spirit over the past two weeks and realized - oh those were all of our plans, but it's not our money. It doesn't belong to us. It's God's. And just because we can afford it, doesn't mean we should afford it.

And maybe this is our chance to not go back over our crops a 2nd, 3rd, or 4th time – but rather create intentional margin in our finances, at a sacrificial cost to ourselves, for the sake of generosity. **That's beautiful!**

Is it wrong for them to do all the house projects on their list? NO. Absolutely not. But is it beautiful and glorifying to God if they don't because they're leaving behind some excess for the Kingdom? YES. Absolutely.

Budget. I had a conversation with another couple this week that told me they looked at their budget – they run a zero sum budget. They have set categories for every last dollar of their income – which is a great way to budget – And their first thought was, we can't stretch in generosity any more.

But the Holy Spirit moved and brought conviction, and they realized – man if we just leave it like that, it's easy for us to say “We can't be any more generous. Our money is spoken for. We can't give right now.”

But they've realized - Oh, we've decided some things in here are needs that are actually wants. We've realized – we can be generous, it just requires us to give up some things. To leave some wheat behind in the field. To sacrifice and actually change our standard of living for the sake of the kingdom of God.

Beautiful stories of how the gospel might actually make its way into our lives and we might actually begin to live as counter cultural disciples when it comes to our finances.

“It Shall Be For”

We tend to think as Americans - what can I afford?

When I think this passage would challenge us to rethink rather - what should I afford?

Because, and this brings us back to our original principle for how to apply this passage - **There are things God has given to you that were never meant for you.**

There is financial provision, God has given to you, in expectation you would pass it along to someone else.

Look back with me at Deuteronomy 24. There's a shocking phrase in here that I want to make sure you caught - because it unlocks this whole thing. Let's look again at the passage, it's in there 3 times, see if you catch it:

19 “When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. 20 When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over them again. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. 21 When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not strip it afterward. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow.

Notice the language Moses uses – It **shall be for** the sojourner, fatherless, and widow.

- Not – it would be *nice* if you gave it to them.
- Not – consider sharing if you *feel led to do so*.
- Not – if you've happened to *have some leftover* this month or got a nice bonus.

This crop and harvest should be **for those** in need. In other words, in God's eyes, **it actually rightfully belongs to those vulnerable groups of people.**

God is saying some of the stuff in your field, that you planted, and you watered, and you grew - that is actually for someone else. And that's kind of offensive if we don't actually believe what we said last week - that it all ultimately belongs to God.

And because it all ultimately belongs to God - He has decided in His good purposes that part of how he is going to get it to others is through you.

There is a portion of your income, given to you by God, that God has explicitly designed and purposed to be for other people through generosity. There is a part of your income that is not for you, at all – it's for someone else. And God has given it to you to steward it, manage it, and then give it away to someone else.

So the invitation for us is to sit down, let God's Spirit radically shape us, and then sacrificially and intentionally create more than is comfortable margin in our finances for ongoing, intentional, and sacrificial generosity.

That's the goal.

Gospel

We sacrificially give, even at inconvenience to ourselves, even at sacrifice to ourselves. And here's the beautiful thing about our God – Has God not already done the same for us?

Look back with me at Deuteronomy 24:22. Look at what God grounds this command in...

22 You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this.

Years before Moses delivers this command to the people, they were living as slaves in Egypt. Under oppression. Needy. Poor. In great desperation. And God saw them in that state, and did not leave them in their need. Rather, He rescued them. He brought them out of slavery, into freedom. Cared for them and provided for their every need as they wandered in the wilderness.

So get this – God is not asking the Israelites to do anything He has not already done for them. He is asking for them to see how he has cared for them, see how He has provided for them, see how He has delivered them from their need, loved them in abundant generosity – and his call is now “ok, you turn around and do the same for others.”

And is this not what we're honing in on this Advent season? God is not calling *us* to anything He hasn't already done. To lean into the generosity of our Heavenly Father – providing for our need in Christ Jesus, born in Bethlehem, murdered on a cross, risen again to rule and reign – to look at God's generosity and know - “God will provide for me. So I don't have to squeeze out every last dollar of my budget. I don't have to maximize out of margin. I am free to create space in my finances to give and give generously to those around me in need.

And that's what we're being invited into – radical generosity at a cost to ourselves in response to the radical generosity of God at great cost to Himself.

College Lifegroup Story

Moped. Over Thanksgiving break I got to catch up with an old college buddy of mine and we were just reminiscing about old stories and things that we experienced together during those 4 years. And I was reminded during our interaction of a story that happened in his small group. He was in a small group, similar to our Community Groups here at Citizens except it was all college dudes. 18-22 year old college dudes. Full time students, a few with part time jobs.

And there was a guy in the group, we'll call him Cody, that was barely making ends meet. He was on his own, paying his way through school, paying for all his bills, all of that and he was doing so as a pizza maker at a local pizza hut. Until one day Cody was involved in a hit and run, somebody t-boned him, totaled his car. And now he's got no way to get to work.

And so one day the guys sit down and they decide to try to raise him enough money to buy Cody a new car. They're like - "We won't tell him, over the next month, get together what you can and let's get this dude a car so he can go to work and it'll cover his rent for this month of missed work too."

Awesome. One problem - they all work part time jobs because they're college students. How are 8 dudes making like \$5/hr going to pull this off? So the majority of them just decide - "look we can't help, I barely make any money, not going to happen."

So they show up to the group the next week, Cody's not there, and so they can talk about it - "hey, how's this looking, etc. etc." And one of the guys pulls out \$500 cash. And they're like "Dude. What? You work at Chick Fil A. Like what?" And he says "yeah, I sold my playstation and my xbox and some clothes. I wanted to help."

And it lit a fire under these dudes. Next thing you know they're all over facebook selling things. One guy held a benefit concert in his front yard to raise money. One guy literally went and donated plasma so he could give.

And they came back together a month later and managed to pull together \$2,500. So they paid his rent and bought him a moped. It was not a car. But man, was God not glorified?

What if that wasn't just a silly thing that college guys did one time 10 years ago? What if that happened today? What if that became some of our stories here at Citizens? What if your heart was so stirred to generosity that you looked at your budget and said "I'm cutting 30% so I can be more generous." or what if you looked at your budget and said "I can't cut anything. So I'm gonna sell some stuff to be generous."

In Acts 2 it says the early church had no one in need, not because everyone was making bank and rolling in the dough and it was easy for them to take care of each other. It says no one was in need because folks would bring what they had, sell it, and distribute the proceeds to those in need.

What if that was the heartbeat of Citizens Church? What if we were known in our city for that level of generosity towards the kingdom of God? Towards the needy? Towards the vulnerable? Towards the marginalized?

What if we sacrificed in this season of economic chaos, job insecurity, financial uncertainty - set a culture that trusted God and leaned in and said:

- At great cost to ourselves, lost people at the Dowd YMCA are going to be engaged with the gospel.
- At great cost to ourselves, even as we figure out how to get planted as a church, we are going to give to see more churches planted across our country for the sake of God's glory.
- At great cost to ourselves we are going to forgo presents we might buy for someone else, so we can buy presents for families in our city as a means of showing the love of Christ.

Does your heart beat for that like the heart of Jesus?

PRAY.

COMMUNION.