

Background - Rhythm of Life

<Provide some context to your group on how we're walking through different areas of our Rhythm of Life - with this series focused on generosity.>

The Rhythm of Life is a tool that we've provided to the Vox community to provide a framework for what spiritual growth and development looks like. In our attempts to support our community in their spiritual formation, we will provide our midweek groups an opportunity to dialogue and practice through each of the rhythms over a few seasons.

In the past, our midweek groups have spent seasons exploring Scripture and prayer and engaging each of those through different practices and expressions, and we have also spent seasons on evangelism and sabbath. The hope is as we package guides for each rhythm, groups can go through them at their own pace or as new groups start up.

Generosity: Session 2 Objectives

By the end of the night, group members will consider and evaluate their posture and response to the practice of giving generously.

Personal Experience

We are called to be generous, and the church practices tithing. A lot of us were taught different things about giving, and may have tried it in the past. We may have baggage associated with giving, or may not have enjoyed the process. Maybe some of us give mindlessly and without sacrifice.

1. What were you taught about tithing/giving? What were some of your earliest practices of giving?

- Reflect on different lessons or instructions that were given to us regarding giving and tithing.

Read and Reflect on 2 Corinthians 8:1-14

Read through this passage a couple times in a similar style as Lectio so that people can hear and reflect on the passage.

Scripture Reading: 2 Corinthians 8:1-14

1 Now I want you to know, dear brothers and sisters, what God in his kindness has done through the churches in Macedonia. 2 They 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. 3 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. 4 They begged us again and again for the privilege of sharing in the gift for the believers in Jerusalem. 5 They 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. 6 So 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. 7 Since 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. 8 I 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. 9 You 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. 10 Here is my advice: It would be good for you to finish what you started a year ago. Last year you were the first who wanted to give, and you were the first to begin doing it. 11 Now you should finish what you started. Let the eagerness you showed involved the beginning be matched now by your giving. Give in proportion to what you have. 12 Whatever you give is acceptable if you give it eagerly. And give according to what you have, not what you don't have. 13 Of course, I don't mean your giving should make life easy for others and hard for yourselves. I only mean that there should be some equality. 14 Right now you have plenty and can help those who are in need. Later, they will have plenty and can share with you when you need it. In this way, things will be equal.

2. What are the phrases and instructions that stand out to you in this passage?

- Paul is writing to Corinth, where he had previously had a "painful" visit and Corinth had been attacking his character. He's writing to them again from a sense of restoration and with hopes that they have turned around. He's writing with instruction on giving and the example of the Macedonians.

Sacrificial Giving

One of the characteristics mentioned in Paul's letter is the idea of sacrifice for the other. Regardless of how "poor" the Macedonians were, they still gave knowing it would affect their own limited resources greatly. Read and reflect on the example of Mary's sacrificial giving.

Scripture Reading: John 12:1-3

Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

3. How is giving meant to be an act of sacrificial devotion to God and to others?

- *When Mary washes Jesus' feet with expensive perfume, it's a truly sacrificial act. Perfume at the time was a woman's insurance policy of sorts, since it was costly and she didn't necessarily have means of earning money. When she washed his feet, the whole house was made to smell wonderful, and everyone was blessed by it. It showed her devotion to Jesus.*

4. How does giving sacrificially compare to simply giving out of abundance? Is one more representative of generosity than the other? Does generosity require sacrifice?

- *We often emphasize generosity as an expression of sacrifice. But what about those who have an abundance and simply give out of their abundance to where it doesn't really affect them? Is their giving not generosity if it doesn't "hurt" them somehow?*

Giving and Independence

Refer to the reflections about giving and independence in the Appendix for more details and thoughts about this question.

Our giving and generosity has an impact on other people. In the example of the prodigal son (Luke 15:13), he wastes all his money on himself. This has an impact on his relationship with his father, brother and friends.

5. In what ways do you prioritize and invest in independence? In what ways might these form a block between you and God, or you and others? How can you destroy the myth of independence for yourself?

- *Reflect on the tension of pursuing independence (which usually is dependent on having financial resources) with the practice of generosity.*
- *How does your approach to finances and resources involve others or how does it negatively impact our relationships?*

Prayer

Close your time in prayer for any reflections that came from this time of dialogue and also allow space for any personal areas that require care.

Appendix - Other Resources

Reflections on Generosity and Independence

Time is money. Money is the ability to choose. And we are a society that prides itself on our choices. We tend to be pretty individualistic in our choices, and so we amass wealth to give ourselves the choices. The prodigal son takes his money from his father so he can make any choice he wants. He's saying he doesn't need his father, or the family, he only needs himself and some cash. And we know how the story ends; he is defeated by his choices. The myth of independence is that we don't need anyone but ourselves, and when we aspire to that, we isolate ourselves, hurt others, and often learn the hard way that we do in fact need others.

Think back to when you were a kid and you were told to share. It was the worst, right? You had a whole cookie (only one, though), and you were asked to split it in half for someone else's benefit. Or a coveted toy (and that grubby kid might break it) that you had to co-own. Sometimes sharing made things more fun (who can play Monopoly by themselves?), but there was often an emotional cost. It's easier to want to store up our treasures and not share them, because we know they'll be cared for and appreciated. But when we give something, especially if it's sacrificial, there's a vulnerability involved. We have to make the decision to give it to someone. Part of the vulnerability is that we aren't in control of how they use it, whether they appreciate it, or even understand how much of a sacrifice it was. When we give money to God, we're saying we're not in charge of what happens to it.

Keeping tight control of our money can lead to a feeling of power and as Paul describes, arrogance. Giving or keeping money is a choice, and that sense of control can come with pride. Money and wealth are temporal, though. The relationships we build with others and the hope we put in God isn't. We don't give for God's sake; we give for our sakes to show humility, trust and faithfulness. We aren't setting our eyes on what we have in the here and now, but we're setting our eyes on the eternal.

Now you've gotten to the point where you're being asked to share your cookie, and maybe you've decided it's something you're willing to do, but there's a final choice to make. How are you going to give this cookie? Matthew tells his readers to think about the posture of their hearts before they make a sacrifice to God. Half a cookie offered up in bitterness or resentment or jealousy doesn't taste nearly as good as half a cookie offered up generously and gladly. It's about the relationship. Are you giving because you have to, or are you giving because it's good? The relationship is impacted in the way that you choose to give, whether it's between you and another person or you and God.

Giving must be done out of love. The act of giving something in any other spirit will not grow the relationship in which the giving is done. It will not change the receiver and it will not change the giver. We should strive to help each other grow in faith and in love. We can only do this by first examining our hearts and waiting to give until we are in tune with the call of love.

Other Scripture

John 12:3 - Then Mary took a twelve-ounce jar of expensive perfume made from essence of nard, and she anointed Jesus' feet with it, wiping his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance.

Luke 15:13 - A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and moved to a distant land, and there he wasted all his money in wild living.

Matthew 6:19 - Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal.

1 Timothy 6:17-19 - Teach those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which is so unreliable. Their trust should be in God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment. Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and generous to those in need, always being ready to share with others. By doing this they will be storing up their treasure as a good foundation for the future so that they may experience true life.

Matthew 5:23 - So if you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God.

1 Corinthians 13:3 - If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing.