

Rebuilding with God: Renewal Through Generosity

Nehemiah 5:14-19 || Pastor Paul Hahn || 31 October 2021

*To CARE for one another in truth and in love,
To GROW together as followers of Jesus,
To SERVE those God has placed in our path.
– CG Mission Statement*

Icebreaker: Do you have a friend or family member who is very hard to buy a gift for? Why is that?

Worship: [1 Timothy 6:17-19](#) (Remain a few moments in worship with this passage. What is God's invitation?)

Sermon Summary for [Nehemiah 5:14-19](#) (Read the passage aloud before reading the sermon summary.)

As He declares that it's more blessed to give than to receive, Christ is calling us to radical generosity. The truth is that God has already given us everything we could possibly need – and infinitely more in our salvation through Christ. By focusing on the awesome generosity of God, our hearts will respond with generosity toward others. As Robert Benson so often prayed, *“We go in peace to love and serve the Lord, and to live so that those to whom love is a stranger will find in us generous friends.”* Love will be a stranger for many that we encounter; they will have great need – an urgency even – for our generosity. Here's how we can offer this to others:

Generosity through Humility in Your Position // Because generosity requires openness, humility is the starting point for generosity. We must be open to our neighbors and their needs, even if this causes us discomfort. Jesus saw no one as unworthy, no one's needs beneath Him. And He willingly endured all kinds of ridicule and threats to care and serve. Only humble people are open like this. The proud are too full of themselves to look beyond their own desires, which we see in the parable of the Good Samaritan. This is a call to humility, to not concern ourselves with things like status or worthiness. We do this because we have already received radical, gracious care from our Savior who humbled Himself freely to redeem us. Christ used His ultimate position of leadership and power to bless and humbly serve, and so we are called to use whatever position or power we have to live likewise.

Generosity Through Forfeiting Your Rights // When did you or I last give up something that was ours by right or by opportunity for the good of a neighbor? This could be forgiving a debt, releasing a friend from a promise, or it might be forgiving them for a wrong they did – something we could easily hold over their head. This forfeiting of rights can be terribly difficult, especially in a culture where demanding our rights seems an inalienable privilege. Not to mention that our culture sees manipulating others because of debts owed (or promises made) as a potent weapon for getting what we want. We see this in the *Parable of the Unmerciful Servant*, who has a colossal debt forgiven only to violently demand repayment for a rather modest debt he is owed. Jesus says we are like this when we fail to forgive, refuse to give up what we are owed, or hold a grudge. Because no matter how wronged or owed we might feel, it is nothing compared to the debt we owe our Father, which He freely forgives through His Son.

Generosity of Sharing at Your Expense // Generosity will often mean lavishly sharing what we have at great expense to ourselves. The key to sharing like this is believing that what we have is to be used to help and bless others who are on the same journey. Of course, it takes quite a lot for us to loosen our grip on what we have. But as John Newton said, *“The gold that rusts in your chests, the clothing moths are destroying in your closets, the bread moldering in your cupboard, all truly belong to the poor.”* When we rightly see all that we have as generous gifts from God, we can begin to live in the utter freedom of sharing all that we have.

Generosity of the Overflow of God's Favor // We know in our hearts that sharing is important. It's why we try so hard to impress upon children its value (even if it seems like the last thing they want to do). Sure, we willfully share when we feel we have more than enough. But Jesus came to shower us with an abundance of God's generous love ([John 10:10](#)). Abundance: this is what we get in Jesus, and the whole Christian life is lived out of its overflow. When

the abundant life in Christ spills its banks in our lives, it runs over into generosity toward others ([1 Tim 6:17](#)). As Miroslav Volf wrote in his book [Free of Charge](#):

Faith is an expression of the fact that we exist so that the infinite God can dwell in us and work through us for the well-being of the whole creation. If faith denies anything, it denies that we are tiny, self-obsessed specks of matter who are reaching for the stars but remain hopelessly nailed to the earth, stuck in our own self-absorption. Faith is the first part of the bridge from self-centeredness to generosity.

Discussion Questions (You will not be able to discuss all the questions. Pick the ones you like. Some are personal perspective and application questions for life-transforming discussions.)

Generosity Through Humility in Your Position

- What strikes you most in these verses of Nehemiah?
 - What part(s) of the story would be considered radically generous in today's world?
- What would it look like to be radically generous in the current season you are in?
(It may be helpful to think beyond just financial generosity.)
- What about your life today gets in the way of the types of generosity discussed above?
- Read [Matthew 20:25-28](#) as a group; reflect on the language of Christ and Nehemiah.

Generosity Through Forfeiting Your Rights

- Read this section of Nehemiah a second time.
 - What social norms does Nehemiah disregard for the good of his soul and for the community?
 - Where in our relationships have we "leveraged our rights"? What makes us unwilling to forgive?
- In light of the Gospel, what does it look like to give up our rights?
 - What does this look like practically in our relationships?

Generosity of Sharing at Your Expense

- In what ways does it look like to store up treasures here on earth?
 - What have you been given, which you don't deserve but you still struggle to share?
- How does God want us to be more radically generous as a Church?
- Where and how do you feel God calling you to be more radically generous?

Prayer

For this week's prayer guide click [HERE](#).

Engage & Experience: Generous Service

Spend time with International Students at USC or UCLA

One of our members in ministry is Cheri Lawrence who works for Bridges - an international student ministry with a presence at USC and UCLA. Each week, Cheri and her team put on large group gatherings for international students at both campuses. The gatherings include dinner and breakout group discussion time. Volunteers are needed to spend time with the students and help facilitate discussions. Everything is planned and prepared ahead of time. This would make a great monthly service opportunity for community groups!

For more info about how you can get involved, please email Alex McKee (alexmckee@pacificcrossroads.org).