

Generosity E2 Final

God as the Generous Host

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Tim: Hey, everybody. This is Tim at The Bible Project and you're listening to The Bible Project podcast. Last week, Jon and I started a new conversation about the theme of generosity in the storyline of the Bible. This is connected to a new video that we're making at The Bible Project.

In the last episode, we explored some of Jesus's most famous teachings about freedom from anxiety and learning about the generosity and abundance that God has in store for His people. Jesus walked around with this deep conviction that despite all of the pain and suffering that he saw going on in the world, despite all the pain and suffering that he himself experienced, he still believed that Yahweh the God of Israel, the creator of heaven and earth is an extremely generous host who has given an overabundance of resources and opportunities to all of us. Jesus was able to manage that tension and think it through because you can see in his teachings his heart and his mind were soaked in the Hebrew Scriptures, and specifically the portrait of the generous God in Genesis 1 and 2.

That's what we're going to look at today. We're going to explore the creation story in Genesis 1, and how it portrays God as an extremely generous host, who's packing creation full of abundance and opportunity. We're also going to look at the story of Adam and Eve, how they forfeit and take advantage of God's generosity. And then we're going to go into the next story outside of Eden. We're going to explore the story of Cain and Abel, which one way to think about it, is a story about one person who gets angry about God's seeming generosity to another. How do you respond when you feel like God's being more generous to somebody else, but not to you?

That raises an even more fascinating question that keeps getting focused on throughout the storyline of the Bible - the concept of God choosing a whole line of people and being extremely generous to them, family of Abraham. Jon and I explore the topic of election, and why it is that God seems to be generous to some more than He is to others, or maybe we're just thinking about this all upside down. We're going to explore these questions and more today on the podcast. So thanks for joining us, and here we go.

We're talking about the theme of generosity in the storyline of the Bible.

Jon: You twitched a little when you said theme. You're still not there? You are still not a theme.

Tim: I might convince myself by the time we're done with this conversation.

Jon: Great.

Tim: We're talking about generosity in the storyline of the Bible. We're going to make a video. We've been pondering along with Jesus and the poets of the Psalms. The portrait of God is a generous Host in Genesis 1. This image of God throwing this amazing party.

Jon: You show up into existence at an amazing party.

Tim: You wake up.

Jon: You wake up and then go to the party.

Tim: Not just you go to someone's house. Literally, you wake up.

Jon: But let's say you did go to someone's house for an amazing party, and everything's hosted, it's amazing, everything's gift, you're not going to worry. You're going to have a good time.

Tim: Yes. Yeah, sure.

Jon: You're not sitting there like, "Oh, well, how do I make sure I get enough drinks? Where's my little corner of this party?"

Tim: "I'm going to grab three from the tray when the person walks by."

Jon: "Wait, that person is using the Hot Tub. Oh I thought..."

Tim: "Oh, wait, there's five more over there." Yeah, that's good. You're not worrying.

Jon: That's Jesus just saying like...

Tim: Jesus from Luke 12.

Jon: ...like, "If you really believe this God's the host of an amazing event, you're just going to enjoy the event." Which then also feels careless when it comes to suffering. But that's what we're going to talk about is why is there suffering at an amazing event?

Tim: That's right. Surely, Jesus obviously isn't a stranger to suffering and death. Look at what happened to him. Of course, he grew up in a beautiful land of abundance, northern Israel, Palestine, but that was full of impoverished Jews because of the Roman occupation. So how can he foster this worldview in that kind of setting? Well, the story on which Jesus was raised at offers a powerful explanation for why there's such poverty in a world of abundance.

Jon: It's like you showed up to a party, and all of a sudden, you notice people acting like they're not at a party. They're just doing all these weird things you shouldn't do at a party. They're like forming these factions and they're making sure certain people don't have access to certain things.

Tim: They like, take the order of trays out of and then they begin to stack them in the den.

Jon: I mean, they only give certain people access to the den.

Tim: Then they block off the den from the rest of the people, and they form a little group

Jon: Yeah. And everyone's like, "What is happening? Where's the host? Someone needs to take care of this. We need him to act and come back and make sure this party goes right."

Tim: Okay, good. Let's make this a Meta story.

Jon: The banquet party.

Tim: The banquet is Genesis 1. And then you start seeing people steal hors d'oeuvre tray and smuggle them into the den, and then they form a little pack. Then you start to ask yourself like, "Why are they acting that way? What's underneath that? What's the psychology?"

Jon: "They should just be enjoying themselves with everyone else."

Tim: "So foolish. Why are they being so shortsighted? Such a limited perspective? What would motivate people to act that way?" Genesis 3 offers us a portrait of why humans would do something like that. It actually begins a portrait that's going to be filled out in the storyline of the Bible of why humans would steal the hors d'oeuvre. It's so good. I like it, Jon. That's helpful.

Jon: Totally. "I'm taking this chocolate fountain for myself."

Tim: "Where's the strawberry."

Jon: "Where's the strawberry? They're all mine."

Tim: What a ridiculous thing to think about. Genesis 3 opens telling us that there is a snake there. That's one of the creatures of the field that the Lord God had made. That's the wording. But it's more shrewd. It's a little sharper than the rest.

Jon: He shows up at the party and he's like, "You know what, I think there's something more here we can do."

Tim: Well, remember, this isn't an inherently negative word - this word shrewd. It gets translated as crafty. In all modern English translations.

Jon: It sounds negative.

Tim: But this word appears only elsewhere in the book of Proverbs where it's a neutral or positive trait. It's somebody who sizes up all the options, the possibilities of a situation and can come up with really creative, clever solutions.

Jon: In StrengthsFinder it's called strategic.

Tim: That's right. Exactly. The snake was more strategic. So he sees all of this abundance, and something happens in him that we're not told. It's not actually developed until later in the biblical story that you find out why this creature did what it did.

Jon: Backstory of this creature.

Tim: You have to wait till Genesis 11, and then really Isaiah 13, and Ezekiel, and look at Daniel.

Jon: And we'll make a video about that.

Tim: We'll make a video about that. But all that happens and he approaches the woman and says...the first thing he tries to undermine is the trust that the host is generous. "Indeed, did God really say that you can't eat from any of these trees?" That's ridiculous.

Jon: He didn't say that.

Tim: This is the exact opposite. And the woman corrects him. "No, no, it's the opposite. We can eat from any.' But now the possibility is out there.

Jon: Now you're thinking it.

Tim: Now you're thinking it. Don't think of pink elephants? "Wait, no, that's not what God said." That's true though.

Jon: It's the power of suggestion.

Tim: That's right. Even if it seems absurd or impossible, it becomes somewhat more possible once you say it out loud.

Jon: Once you say it aloud. Once you plant the idea.

Tim: "Did God say you can't eat any of the food at the party?" "No, no, no, he said that we could. Oh, yeah. But there's that one thing that we are not supposed to eat from the tree that's in the middle of the garden." Here it just assumes that you've internalized what knowing good and evil means and what it would mean to take that for yourself. Note what she says. "But God said about that tree you shall not eat from it, or touch it." Which God never said don't touch thing, or you will surely die.

The serpent said to the woman, "No." Once again, "Oh, no, no, no, that hors d'oeuvre plate is fine for you to eat. Go right ahead." So different tactic now. First, it was just that power of suggestion. Now it's an alternative story. God told you you're going to kill yourselves, you're going to die if you seize to know and discern good and evil in your own wisdom. Actually, that's not the case.

Actually, the opposite is the case. Here's what God knows, but isn't telling you that when you eat from that your eyes will be opened and you'll be like Elohim. You'll be like the divine in the capacity to know. And not just know. To know good and evil means and to define it, to make decisions about it. I mean, we're only five verses in and the full deception package is right there.

Jon: Yeah. You called the tree of knowledge of good and evil a hors d'oeuvre plate.

Tim: I did.

Jon: Where this story starts to feel weird or absurd is having an hors d'oeuvre plate in the center of the banquet table, and then saying, "Guys, just stay away from that one." But there's something so central to this urge to take control ourselves. It is central. It's like always there right in the center.

Tim: That's a good point. I pondered two times in Genesis 1 through 3, it's positioned in the middle.

Jon: In the middle of the garden. It's always highlighted.

Tim: It's highlighted. Perhaps one way to think about that is it's describing the ever-present possibility of me to abuse my existence and the abundance or opportunity that I have. It's ever-present. In other words, some people would say it's in the middle, and they would blame God for that. "Why did He put it right there?" Have you heard that line before?

Jon: Totally. "Why didn't He put it in a corner and lock it up?"

Tim: "Put it in the far end." The point is, but that's not true to human experience.

Jon: It's always present.

Tim: It's always a possibility for me to ruin. Oh, gosh, I think this all the time. My kids will do this. We'll be having a great moment at dinner, and then one of my sons will just like... August did this the other night. He was just eating rice, and we are in this great conversation and then he just ejected it all out of his mouth. Just spewed rice all over the table for no good reason. He just wanted to know what would happen? And it did on my face? And it's like, "Ah." Then all this great conversation got and it was over. We're just one small choice away from ruining the party. It's always present. It's in the middle. Jon, thank you.

Jon: Yeah, right?

Tim: For some reason that's locking in for me in a way I haven't thought about it before.

Jon: Yeah, it's in the middle. I've thought about it in terms of that you can't get from one side of the garden to the other without walking by it. Another way you can think about it is like, no matter where you're looking in the garden, it's in your field of view. It's like it's ever-looming reality.

Tim: That's right. Actually, in our Genesis 1 and 2 series, I want to do a whole video about the tree. Because sacred trees representing either the gift of life from the gods or sacred resources from the gods, this is a motif and ancient Near Eastern art and literature. The Tree of Life. There's the Egyptian trees of life and Babylonian. You can go find drawings of them. Google them, and you'll find them. They are cool looking.

So I think of biblical authors taking this motif and transforming it because knowing good and evil is also going to be the gift that the Torah presents to Israel. What are they going to do with this gift of knowing good and evil that God's given them through the Torah? Are they going to follow it or they're going to abuse it? The gift of wisdom in the book of Proverbs, the Wisdom is a tree of life. It's Proverbs 3.

Jon: The Torah is the tree of life?

Tim: The Torah is the tree of life. That's right. That's how the book of Proverbs frames it. "My Torah is a tree of life," the Father says in the speeches in Proverbs 1-9. So the tree and the Torah...

Jon: So not following the Torah would then be the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Tim: It would be taking the tree and reducing it to my own wisdom. In Proverbs, it's rejecting the wisdom of your elders is the equivalent to taking from the tree and defining good and evil by your own wisdom. And that's an ever-present possibility in every moment of my existence is to ruin everything by a horrible choice. One horrible choice. I think about that all the time.

Jon: You know what? I think about that too. I remember years ago, I was talking with a colleague, Ken and he asked me this question. He's got the funniest questions sometimes. He said, "How many choices do you think you're away from completely screwing up your life?" And it turned into this thought experiment game and we're like, "Okay, how many?" And I'm thinking about it and I'm like, "Is it four or five?" And then once we kind of work through it, we're like, "We are one or two decisions away from completely screwing up."

Tim: Ruining everything irreversibly. Wow. That's terrifying.

Jon: It is terrifying.

Tim: The tree in the middle of the garden right there.

Jon: It's the tree in the middle of the garden.

Tim: Yeah, there it is.

Jon: This is right there ready to destroy you.

Tim: That's right. Totally.

[00:15:13]

Tim: Remember our Meta story is there's a group of people at the party, they're locked up in the...we're doing the den and the poolroom.

Jon: I like the poolroom.

Tim: Okay, let's go with poolroom. They stole half a hors d'oeuvre plate, and you're thinking, "Why are they doing that? Let's say you can interview one, and they'll be honest. They'll say, "Well, we began to become aware like..."

Jon: "This party will end one day."

Tim: "This party will end. There may actually not be enough for everybody and we think it would be good for us to hoard up hors d'oeuvre plates. That seems wise in our eyes. Sorry for you guys out there, but we got to think about our group."

Jon: "You guys will figure it out."

Tim: "You'll figure it out. There's enough out there still for you but we're going to seal off ourselves." "Wow, that's a very different mentality than when we all first showed up here."

Jon: Totally. Yeah. That's a very interesting parable.

Tim: Yeah, it.

Jon: You could have a conversation with that person, and they can really convince you in a logical way of like, "I'm sorry this is hard for you, but this is the right thing for us to be doing."

Tim: It's what we've got to do? We've got to look out for my good."

Jon: It's the good and the right thing. And you can kind of go like, "I guess I can see how you got there. It sucks for me though."

Tim: Genesis 3:6 "When the woman saw that the tree was good for eating..."

Jon: It's a good.

Tim: Perfectly good tree. "...it was a beautiful to the eyes and that the tree was desirable." This is key. It's the word "chamad" in Hebrew. That's the verb. Or "nechmad" is the actual word. But then it's from the root chamad. It's the word to covet. One of the Ten Commandments, "do not covet" is this word, desire. Desire. So the tree was covetable.

Jon: So "do not covet" could also be "do not desire"?

Tim: Correct. Which doesn't sound right in English. Covet is actually good English word there because it's about an illegitimate desire for a thing that is not rightly mine, or that ought not to be mine. So this tree is desirable for making me wise. So she took. Coveting, desiring, and taking is the fundamental act here. And then she ate and then she gave. She's giving. Oh, how generous! But no.

After the desiring and taking, even giving is now tainted. With her and he ate. It's just six verses we looked at in Genesis, but it's study of what people do with abundance. The problem of abundance for selfish humans. It's good.

Jon: Well, in a world of abundance, in the nature of this reality, there is also the ever-present potential to grow it up or to turn it in words.

Tim: Or something potentially that can look more noble.

Jon: And it could look noble, and it will look noble.

Tim: To look out for me...

Jon: That's the thing...

Tim: To look out for me and mine.

Jon: ...is problem of twisting abundance into selfishness looks noble.

Tim: Yes. Within a universe where there's not enough if my perspective on the universe is there's not enough...

Jon: Then it makes perfect sense.

Tim: It makes perfect sense.

Jon: That's very noble. You're taking care of the people you love. And that problem is represented in the image of a beautiful fruit tree in the center of the garden. God said, "It's going to look good, trust me."

Tim: "It will kill you."

Jon: "That's the one that'll destroy the party."

Tim: It is interesting. I'm interested in this limited perspective. Again, back to where we began this. Jesus begins his teaching and then ends with him saying, "Therefore, sell your stuff and give it away because it's going to corrupt your perspective. Because the more stuff you have, the more you're going to be thinking about how there is not enough." It's like it'll foster the opposite mindset. But the abundance creation mindset of the biblical story will free you to enjoy the party. That's interesting.

There's two approaches to seeing the world. In one, it clearly seems absurd that you would hoard things or store up things for you and your group in a way that deprives others. That doesn't make any sense.

Jon: Would it be interesting to show up at that party, and it's well into the party, and things have been pretty established of all this weird stuff happening. People in poolroom, people in the den. Like there's...

Tim: Oh, got it. There's groups holding up in different rooms.

Jon: Yeah. People are just kind of...they're not acting like it's a party anymore. But you show up and you know it's a party and you know that there is enough. That would be such a weird to then go into poolroom and interact with those people.

Tim: You're trying to convince them.

Jon: You're trying to convince them, "Oh, there is enough." And then for you to then go, "You just know the host is going to bring more and it's going to continue. And even all of this chaos that we're creating, he's going to come and solve that, too." It's weird. You're going to be like, "I want to try to figure out how to enjoy the party, but also help you try to figure out how to enjoy the party. Let's get this started again."

Tim: Yeah, that's right. You know what it's funny? We've already said this but it's more clear to me in this moment, that when you read those teachings of Jesus where he says, "Look at the Ravens and look at the lilies." I have found, myself included, many people in our cultural setting, we read that and it's hard for us. We're like, "That sounds hippie or irresponsible." But what's actually happening is just this clash of worldviews, where the reason it bothers me is because I don't actually hold that view of the world.

We've talked through the flow of Genesis 3-11 multiple times but just think through it real quickly with me in light of this abundance, generosity versus scarcity and taking mindset. Genesis 4, Cain's jealousy, and anger compels him to take the life of his brother. So instead of focusing on his ability to give life by being a farmer of the ground, he's angry.

Jon: Well, can we stop here on that? This bugs me about the story of Cain and Abel. God is more generous to Abel than He is to Cain.

Tim: Well, He just looks with favor.

Jon: What does that mean? I got to imagine that means...okay, maybe I'm reading too much into this. But you give an offering to God in the sense of "all this is yours. Here's a symbol of that," but you're doing it because you want another good harvest. You want abundance.

Tim: Or you're saying thank you.

Jon: And you're saying thank you.

Tim: We're saying thank you from harvest that we just had.

Jon: Oh, all they're doing is say thank you, maybe. But the expectation is favor.

Tim: Well, I think certainly, it's a reciprocal kind of thing. Yahweh sends rain, gives me abundant crops, and so I take the symbolic tokens of my crop and I say, "Thank you so much."

Jon: You think these were thank offerings that Cain and Abel would do?

Tim: Ah, well, at least what Cain's offering, he's a worker of the ground.

Jon: Well, they both offer a portion of their harvest.

Tim: Correct. That's right. What he's offering is a grain offering, which in Leviticus is solely a thank you offering.

Jon: Oh, it's not the same thing here?

Tim: Well, it didn't atone, cover for sins. It wasn't a form of petition. It was thank you.

Jon: Should I be thinking about that when I'm reading the story?

Tim: I think so. Cain's saying thank you.

Jon: No, that's Cain's story. He's saying thank you. And Abel has...

Tim: He brings from the firstborn of his flock.

Jon: And that's a sin offering?

Tim: The Passover sacrifice is the firstborn. The Passover meal is the firstborn of the flock. Again, this is Genesis 4, all the language here is crafted with an eye towards the depictions of sacrifice later on. However, I don't think the story is trying to tell us that one's sacrifice is better than the other. Both are legitimate forms of sacrifice.

Jon: I've heard you say that and so I grant that, but God shows favor towards one and not the other.

Tim: Correct.

Jon: So what does that mean other than He is being more generous to one than the other?

Tim: Actually, my current way of understanding it - I have learned that these things develop and change the more you ponder - is that it's an intentionally ambiguous gap in the narrative.

Jon: The favor?

Tim: The favor. Because it's going to be developed throughout all the generations why Abraham, but not his brothers, his other two brothers, why did God choose him to be the vehicle of blessing, why Isaac but not Ishmael, and then certainly, why Jacob, whose name means deceiver. So it's the mystery. Genesis, I think, is developing the portrait of the mystery of why God chose one family out of all the families.

Jon: That's what this favoritism...

Tim: It's the mystery of election. The whole theme of election in Paul's writing...

Jon: Is all about this

Tim: ...is all about this. And it's a very old mystery. The fact that God chooses one doesn't mean that there isn't more blessing for others.

Jon: Yeah. Well, the way I've been taught election, growing in the faith, was it does mean that.

Tim: I see.

Jon: But that is interesting when you connect it to the story of God choosing one person over another as a vehicle for...

Tim: For blessings for all the others.

Jon: ...for blessing all the other.

Tim: That's the logic of all the whole thing. Especially dense in the Abraham...

Jon: But whenever I was taught and read election kind of stuff I ripped out of that context.

Tim: I see.

Jon: And it's really just more about why do some people get to go to the party and others don't.

Tim: That's right. Well, once you take election out of the biblical context, and you put it into some people go to the good place after they die, some people go to the bad place, who gets to go? The ones that are prewritten in the script. But that's a different story than the biblical story.

Jon: All right.

Tim: That's certainly not what Paul has in mind. In Ephesians 1, he has in mind this story. It's about the family of Abraham selected out from all the nations to bring blessing to the others.

Jon: Okay. So back to Cain and Abel.

Tim: I'm so sorry. Cain and Abel.

Jon: You're great. I did that and that was wonderful. That was helpful for me. But to get back on track, the favor isn't...I'm not supposed to be thinking like, "Oh, God's hooking up one and not the other. He's being more generous to one and not the other." I mean, there's a sense.

Tim: There is a favor.

Jon: There is a favor.

Tim: Yeah. But it doesn't mean that it's at the complete expense of the other person.

Jon: Well, Cain experienced it that way.

Tim: He sure feels that way, but is that a necessary response? Or is that just a limited perspective - selfish response?

[00:27:00]

Tim: Again, remember Genesis 4 and 3 are mirror stories of each other.

Jon: Right.

Tim: So everything's fine. And then all of a sudden, that possibility is introduced of "Oh, but perhaps God's holding out on me." In Genesis 3, it's...

Jon: Abel gets this thing - what's God holding out on me?

Tim: "Does that mean I don't get? Well, what is it that I don't get? The favor? Or what does that mean for the future?" In the same way that "did God say?" The snake says, "Did God say don't eat from any tree?" "No, He didn't."

Jon: It's a limited perspective.

Tim: It's a limited perspective.

Jon: Do I trust that God is good? And even though my brother's experiences something I don't get to experience, do I still trust that in the end...

Tim: ...there are also good things for me too?

Jon: What about when Paul says, though, "Abel, I loved; Cain, I hated."

Tim: Esau.

Jon: Oh, that was Jacob and Esau.

Tim: Actually, Jacob and Esau becomes through design patterns a really deep exploration of the Cain and Abel story - of the two brothers.

Jon: I got it mixed up in my head.

Tim: Yeah, exactly. They're so mapped onto each other. That's right. However, it's also clear that when Paul's quoting there, he's quoting from Malika, which is refracting back onto the Genesis story through the lens of the whole history of Israel. Because then Malaki, Jacob, and Esau are tribal names of the whole tribe. So dude, Cain and Abel through Jacob and Esau become all developed through design patterns the stories Israel versus Edomites through the story.

When Paul or Malika looks back on the Cain and Abel story, they do so through the lens of the whole story of Edom and Israel, Jacob and Esau, Cain and Abel as if it's one thing. Because it is in the final frame of the Hebrew Bible. And the loving and the hating, I think, presently, at least as far as I understand that, it's a hyperbolic contrast.

Jon: Does that language makes it difficult for me to know?

Tim: Oh, actually here, where Malika is getting that Jacob I loved, but the Esau I hated is Malaki...Dude, the Hebrew Bible is so awesome and complex. It's actually using the language of how Jacob treated his two rival wives, the older and the younger. He loved the younger, but Leah, the older was hated at the line in the Jacob story. He loved Rachel but Leah was the hated one. Which doesn't mean he disliked her. It's a way I think it's...

Jon: It doesn't mean there was all this animosity between them?

Tim: I think it's a Semitic turn of phrase. At least I think.

Jon: It's another way to say he showed favor on one and not the other?

Tim: Yeah. That's right.

Jon: So could you in that Hebrew turn of phrase say that Cain was hated and Abel was loved in the story?

Tim: I think so. I think so.

Jon: But not in the modern English way that we talk about hate?

Tim: Exactly. At least I think that's the case. I could be wrong about that. I need to think about it more. Either way, Cain feels like he's being hated on in our English sense of the word. He clearly feels that way. Maybe to use our party parable, it would be that the host comes out and brings a special hors d'oeuvre plate for the birthday boy. And then everybody else is like, "What the deal. Why did they get that special plate? Yeah, I know. I've got all these other plates here that are available to me too, but they got that one. Am I going to get that one? What if I don't?"

Jon: "Is it ever going to be my birthday?"

Tim: "Does that mean the host doesn't like me? Why doesn't he like me? I'm angry." I don't know. Something like that.

Jon: Well, you imagine the party it's gotten so bad that the host is like, "Okay, here's what I'm going to do. I'm just going to find someone here at the party to..."

Tim: Help convince them of the real view of things.

Jon: "...remind them this is a party, get them living in the right way."

Tim: Sure. "So I'm going to hook one of these people up..."

Jon: "I'm going to give them more attention. I'm going to bring them into my living room. We're going to chat about it. I'm going to tell them this is the way of a real party, and I need you guys get on board with me and we're going to go." And then everyone else is looking around like, "Why do they get all this favoritism?"

Tim: "Why do they get to go into the special room?"

Jon: "Why are they hanging on the fireplace with the host?"

Tim: "I want that. Why didn't you choose me?"

Jon: "Now I'm angry because they got favor." That's the Cain?

Tim: That's the Cain story.

Jon: Of like, "God spending some extra time with that guy. That means He doesn't like me."

Tim: "He must not like me."

Jon: But his host scheme is trying to get the whole party started for everyone.

Tim: That's right. That's right.

Jon: And the host would be like, "Whoa, there's something animating there within you that's a like a brute problem."

Tim: Totally. And the host is thinking, "No, I'm working out a plan to restore the order and Shalom to the party for everybody. Just wait a minute." And then the guy is like, "No, no, I'm angry."

Jon: "I'm taking this in my own hands."

Tim: That's right. And then he kills the favorite - the one brought in the room.

Jon: Which is not going to go well for the party.

Tim: Totally. It makes the party even worse.

Jon: Now you get a murder scene.

Tim: Totally. So God says to that guy, the murderer, "Man, you got to get out of here. You leave the party." So he leaves the building, he goes east and builds a city and builds his own house with his own counterparty. Except things don't go well there because Lamech shows up to his party and just start murdering people.

Jon: It's like, "I know how you like to throw a party, Cain"

Tim: Totally. And then generations keep going by, and then those descendants all leads up to the building of the great anti-Eden party, which is the city of Babylon. Once again, God said, "Be fruitful and multiply, fill the land." And what they say is "No, no, no, that's not enough. We got to all get in one place."

Jon: There's a fine line between a party and a mob.

Tim: Totally. Let's think this through with Babylon story. So they say, "Let's all get together as one so that we're not scattered out there in the land. And then let's build our own city and tower that ascends up to the realm of God. Let's make a name for ourselves. Let's provide for ourselves." And of course, God knows that that's going to go horribly, and so He scatters them.

But once again, it's humans now providing for themselves. "We'll make our own city. We don't want God to provide us with the party. We're going to make our own party, and it will have our name on the front door. It's our city, and it's our party."

Jon: If you can't join them, beat them.

Tim: So God scatters. And then His counter is to take one group, again, one person, one line...

Jon: He actually goes to another party and He's like, "Hey, can you help me out at this? Can you get this other party back on track?"

Tim: So this is the calling of Abraham. The calling of Abraham...

Jon: You're going to leave your party that you think it's awesome, which is really just turning into just disaster.

Tim: Totally. That's right.

Jon: I mean, it doesn't even look like anything close to a party.

Tim: "Your lifespan is going to be really short if you stay at that party at the anti-Eden party. So come back to Eden as a new human." Abraham and Sarah are a new Adam and Eve being invited into a new type of Eden. And the poem that opens up the Abraham story is exactly that.

Jon: It's like the original party kind of like stopped. It's guarded by Cherubim now.

Tim: Totally. Guess we're all kicked out.

Jon: And it's like, "We're going start, but we're going to start get small."

Tim: Yeah, start with one family. And what God say is, "I'm going to give you blessing, blessing, blessing, blessing."

Jon: This is the Abel figure. Guess he's the person who...

Tim: Abraham?

Jon: Abel as a type. The one who gets the favor, who then is Abraham, who is Jacob is the one who gets the favor, who is the second born always. So also interesting. And it's not because God is being more generous to one than the other. It's that He's got a plan.

Tim: He's got a plan and he's going to start with one. Because the promise that He makes to Abraham is "I'm going to bless you, bless you, bless you, bless you." And the last sentence of the poem is, "And in you, all the families of the earth will find blessing." But he is starting with one. Again, we're back to the mystery of biblical election, which is God is on a mission to restore blessing to all if they want it, and He's going to start with one. But His selection of that one presents an ever-present choice for all those around.

Jon: Of envy.

Tim: Of envy, of anger. And that's what's being explored. In every generation of the book of Genesis, there are people starting with Cain and Abel. Actually, starting with humans. There are those observing around looking at the one God's chosen to be the vehicle blessing for all the people. The onlookers are faced with a choice, and in every generation, there are those who choose jealousy, anger, and violence.

Jon: And God's response to those...

Tim: Think of Joseph's story...Sorry, go ahead.

Jon: His response to Cain is "just do the right thing."

Tim: "If you do good, you will be lifted up," he says. "You will be exalted."

Jon: Which is not what you want to hear when you're feeling like you're being left out of the party. I don't know. I'm feeling unloved. It doesn't seem like what I want to hear is like, "Just do the right thing." But it's interesting that that's what God tells him.

Tim: Yes. Genesis 4:7. "Isn't it true that if you do good, lifting up - this is in Hebrew, hyper-literal Hebrew - isn't it so that if you do good lifting up - exaltation?"

Jon: If you do good, you'll be lifted up?

Tim: Yeah, that's right. The point is that you'll be exalted too. I'm favoring your brother right now, but there is exaltation for you as well. Just trust me and do the right things.

Jon: Just keep party on.

Tim: Just party on. All I'm asking you to do is enjoy the party. I'm really enjoying this parable.

Everybody, thank you for listening to this episode of The Bible Project podcast. This series is kind of short, we just have a couple more episodes where we're going to be discussing generosity. After that, as we normally do, we want to host a Q&R episode.

So if these conversations about generosity in the Bible have piqued your curiosity, or if you have some questions, we would love to hear them. Please send them to us. You can record an audio file of yourself and send it to us at info@jointhebibleproject.com. If you can try to keep your question about 20 or 30 seconds. We would love also to hear your name and where you're from.

Today's show was produced by Dan Gummel, theme music is by the band Tents. The Bible Project is a crowdfunded animation studio in Portland, Oregon. We make all of these videos and resources and podcasts. It's all available for free because of people like you and your generous support. So thank you guys so much for being a part of this with us.

Janary: Hello, my name is Janary Suyat de Godoy, and I'm from the Philippines, but I live in Okinawa, Japan. I use The Bible Project with our Asia Pacific Nazarene Youth International page on Facebook and I share the videos there for our young people. I read the Scripture using the app, and so it's really nice to watch the video first that you have done before reading the scripture for the day. We believe the Bible is a unified story that leads to Jesus. We are a crowdfunded project by people like me. Find free videos, study notes and more at thebibleproject.com.