

Generosity E4 Final

Jesus as the Ultimate Gift

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Jon: Hey, this is Jon Collins at The Bible Project, and this is our fourth and final conversation in a series talking about the theme of generosity in the storyline of the Bible. God is the generous host of all creation. He created life in abundance, and He created humanity to share and extend that abundance. But what we find instead is that humans don't trust the host. We don't believe there's enough, and we believe that we know the best way to create security in life for ourselves. But our way doesn't create life, it creates mistrust, broken relationships, pain and death. We don't create abundance, we create Babylon.

Tim: God's response to the death and destruction of the world that He orders and that He loves is to give it a gift. I think this is such a great way of thinking about the calling of Abraham in response to Babylon. It continues to give gifts that sow the seeds of a new creation.

Jon: God wants this family to trust in His generosity and to become the blessing to every other family in the world. And as it turns out, they struggle. Now, if you think about it, it's a pretty odd strategy that the Bible is claiming that God has. God keeps giving gifts to humans and humans keep willfully ignoring, and destroying, and mistrusting Him. But this is God's strategy, and the idea here is perhaps one of the most famous verses in the Christian Bible. John 3:16 "God so loved the world that He gave..."

Tim: In other words, this little one-liner is summarizing the meaning of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection in the language of generosity and giving. God gave to his enemies.

Jon: So God gave the ultimate gift to humanity, Jesus Christ. And Jesus taught often on giving and generosity, saying things like, "It's more blessed to give than to receive."

Tim: Apparently, the good life for Jesus actually has very little to do with your economic situation, that there's some other definition of the good life that he's showing and that Jesus' movement is after. If it gives you security, it'll be on a different level.

Jon: So today, we get back to Jesus, how Jesus viewed the generosity of God, and how Jesus is the generous gift of God to us. Thanks for joining us. Here we go.

We're talking about the theme of generosity through the storyline of the Bible, and we are now going to talk about Jesus and his vision of what this generous thing God's doing.

Tim: But the Jesus part of generosity theme in the Bible is in direct response to iterations of the story that have come before it. Humanity, given the gift of existence and the world and the opportunity to partner, they squander that by fostering a scarcity mentality and then hoarding and using resources for me and mine.

Jon: I like how you summarized it. You said, there's a mistrust in the host, it lead to a scarcity mentality, which led to deciding to define good and evil on our own terms to take care of ourselves.

Tim: That's right. And then forgetting, you do that long enough...

Jon: Yeah, you do that long ago.

Tim: ...you do that last step long enough, and then you eventually forget that everything you have is a gift in the first place. You begin to think it's actually you and yours and you're responsible for it all.

Jon: "Look at what I've done - the name I've made for myself."

Tim: "Isn't this Babylon the Great that I have made and my power?" That's what Nebuchadnezzar says in Daniel. You're just like, "Whoa." Until you think about my own mindset. I mean, I do that every day. Actually, one of the things I tried to do is have little rituals of gratefulness in the first 30 minutes of every day.

Jon: Oh, that's great.

Tim: Yeah. Usually, it's in the forms of little prayers that I've collected over time.

Jon: That's awesome.

Tim: It's just simple practice. But just every day that greets me is a gift, so why not name it out loud when I wake up?

Jon: At the end of the day, with Paxton and **Silah**, my boys, I always ask them what they're thankful for before bed.

Tim: That's good.

Jon: Half the time, they'll play along and they'll be thankful for their mom and for me and deep friends, and stuff. And then we'll just thank God for that and they'll go to bed. But half the time, there's like, "Nothing." Or as Silah says, "Noshing." "I'm thankful for noshing." And then I just go, "Okay, well, I'll tell you what I'm thankful for."

Tim: Human nature. In response to human abuse of the divine generosity, God chooses one family to give the super gift to the family of Abraham, great abundance, great favor, rescuing them from terrible enslaving empires, and gives them the gift of a New Eden, so to speak, in the promised land. The gift is unconditioned to Israel, but it's not unconditional. This is my little beef with the phrase "unconditional grace." It's not unconditional. It's unconditioned.

Jon: What's the difference? Ah, if I give you a gift, that's unconditioned. It means there's nothing that you've done to make me want to give you the gift. I'm just giving you the gift. There were no conditions. But once I've given you the gift...

Jon: There now are conditions.

Tim: ...there are conditions to show your gratefulness for the gift. I gave it to you, it's an unconditioned gift...

Jon: It's a free gift.

Tim: ...given with great expectation of return. That's for sure the setup with the land in the story of Israel.

Jon: I guess that's the gift of co-ruling too, right?

Tim: Yes.

Jon: There's nothing humans did to deserve to be co-rulers with God over creation. But now that we've been given that gift, comes with these conditions, which is to trust His wisdom.

Tim: Yeah, yeah. And listen and obey Him. This is a distinction made by a New Testament scholar named John Barclay, a really important book called "Paul and the Gift." It's one of the most important study about the concept of grace in the New Testament that's been written in many generations. I've only read sections of it. But even just that little distinction, I think helps clarify what we mean when we say free grace or pure grace because both Moses and the apostles have pretty high expectations.

Jon: You don't have to read far into scripture to find expectations for how you deal with grace.

Tim: Yeah, how you respond to the grace. But the grace was given to you without any conditions that you fulfilled to receive the gift. But now that you've been given these gifts, there are expectations of return.

Jon: What was the book again?

Tim: "Paul and the Gift."

Jon: Paul and the Gift.

Tim: It's a focus on Paul's letters but as a gateway to the whole New Testament theology of grace. So it's unconditioned gift that has conditions once you've been given it. And that is be faithful to God's wisdom, which includes "be generous." All these laws to Israel about sharing the goodness of the land, people who are in hard situations, and the exodus creating equal playing field.

Jon: It's an interesting way to just think about life in general. Like, why do I exist? Why am I conscious being within the body getting to live in the world? I didn't do anything.

Tim: You just woke up,

Jon: I just got woke up, and here I have it. It's unconditioned gift.

Tim: Unconditioned gift.

Jon: But now that I have it, there's a responsibility of using it in a way that's good.

Tim: Yeah, that imitates the generosity of the one who gave me the gift. Israel's inability to imitate that or their refusal to imitate God's generosity is what landed them in exile. And by the time of Jesus back in the land, it's still a very difficult situation.

- Jon: And this idea of exile and slavery becomes a way to think about not just one nation in one particular time in history, it's a way for Paul to talk about just the human condition of being captured by evil.
- Tim: Greater forces and powers of evil.
- Jon: That enslave us.
- Tim: That enslave us. That's the message of the Hebrew Scriptures. Then Jesus and Paul believe that the time has come when God is bringing about the great liberation, not just from a human institution of slavery, but in a cosmic slavery to evil and selfishness that all humanity has undergone. That is the meaning of Jesus's great announcement when he shows up on the scene saying the reign of God has arrived.
- Jon: The reign against that evil.
- Tim: Correct. We're meant to see him as a Moses-like figure marching up into Pharaoh's court and saying, "Let my people go." The new Exodus is taking place. God's the one actually in charge and you need...
- Jon: And He's not marching up the Pharaoh, he's marching up to the powers and authorities, evil.
- Tim: Yeah, he goes out to the wilderness, confronts something dark, terrible that's connected to that snake and connected to all the other crazy stuff that we've talked about in the last year. The powers of evil that lure us into self-destruction and to choosing self-destruction.

Jesus comes onto the scene announcing the kingdom of God is here. And what's the proper way to respond to that? Matthew gives us a condensed form of it. He calls it the good news of the kingdom at the end of Matthew 4. We call it a Sermon on the Mount. But Jesus goes around announcing the good news of the kingdom, teaching and proclaiming in their synagogues is Matthew 4. And then it raises the question and the reader is like, "Oh, I wonder what it would be like to hear Jesus give one of those teaching sessions." And then he plops Matthew 5 right in front of you, the Sermon on the Mount.

So, lots of things going on in the Sermon on the Mount, but generosity is a big part of it. He gets to the part where he's critiquing Israel's misunderstanding of the laws of the Torah. This is Matthew 5. There are six sayings of Jesus, where he says, "Listen, you've heard what was said," and he'll quote from along the Torah. " And then he will respond and say, "But I say to you, in light of my role as the giver of the Messianic Torah which fulfills..." It doesn't cancel, it fulfills the purpose of the laws of the Torah. And then he'll show what the whole point was all along.

So he gets in Matthew 5:43 "You have heard that it was said, 'you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you..." Let's pause right there. First of all, there's no verse in the Old Testament that says, "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy."

- Jon: There is none. I have a footnote in Leviticus 19:18.

Tim: Leviticus 19:18 is the "love your neighbor."

Jon: That's the love your neighbor as self.

Tim: Love your neighbor as yourself. That is 19:18.

Jon: So there's a verse says that?

Tim: In other words, what Jesus is quoting is not just the laws of the Torah, but how the laws of the Torah have been interpreted and are being practiced by Israel in his day.

Jon: That's interesting that hate your enemy was added.

Tim: Yeah. And I think what he's paraphrasing is, "here's how we are all actually living. Here's how y'all are actually living."

Jon: In our own wisdom we think loving our neighbor means we need to hate our enemy.

Tim: That's right. Good neighbor.

Jon: That makes sense because your neighbor is not your enemy, it's your neighbor.

Tim: It's your neighbor.

Jon: And to help protect your neighbor, we have a common enemy. Let's band together.

Tim: That's right. Here's how the world works. We reserve love for people in our tribe, and if you're not in my tribe, you are suspect or the object of my hate. Here's life in post-Eden world. You love your neighbor, take care of you and yours, but if it's at the expense of others or in opposition to others, so be it.

Jon: This is the logic in our parable of the guys at the party.

Tim: Yeah, totally.

Jon: I'm like, "Guys, does it make sense? If we're going to take care of people we care about..."

Tim: "We can't take care of everybody."

Jon: "...we actually have to fight against other people."

Tim: Yeah, that's right. Here's Jesus' response to that. He says, "Here's what I say, 'Love your enemies, pray for people who are actively hostile to you, so that you may be sons of your heavenly Father.'" So sons, imitators - people in the family of God who act like carry on the family ethic. Really?

Jon: The family ethic is to love your enemies.

Tim: The family ethic is to love people and be generous to people that hate you and are actively hostile to you. Jesus, how do you know that about the Heavenly Father? Look at the reason he gave. "Well, think about it. He causes His sun...

Jon: He created the sun.

Tim: ...to rise on the evil and the good and he sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." This is back to the like when he was talking about the ravens and the flowers.

Jon: Yeah, let's just think about nature for a second.

Tim: Creation theology. But this is good. So ultimate cause behind the sun, my Father. So it's his sun. Here's something I observe is that my family gets up in the morning and they're Torah observant and practice the Shema.

Jon: The sun shines on us.

Tim: And the sun shines on them. But man, Yirmiyahu down the street, that old kahal.

Jon: Yirmiyahu?

Tim: Yirmiyahu is Hebrew for Jeremiah. So old Yirmiyahu down the street. Oh, he's a grouch, he yells at the kids, his wife died and he got all this family money and he doesn't share it with anybody. He's not a good person. And his skin looks great, tan at the end of every summer.

Jon: Because the sun shines on him too.

Tim: Because the sun shines on him. He doesn't deserve that. But God my Father gives him sunshine anyway. That's it. Or old man Ysayahu who grouch and he's mean...

Jon: Oh, that guy.

Tim: He's taken advantage of his neighbors when they went into debt.

Jon: You see that guy turn the other direction?

Tim: Yeah, yeah. Actually, his other neighbor went into debt, and he bought his land right out from under him, and made him now slave on his own land. And man, he had a great crop this year, because the rain that fell on our land to give a good crop also fell on his.

Jon: God, his generosity extends to people you think deserve it and don't deserve it.

Tim: And who don't deserve it. So that's how God's ordered creation to give a space for people who deserve to exist, and people who in my humble opinion, don't deserve to exist. Then what should that tell me about God's character? And if I am a part of God's family, how should I behave towards them?

Well, so he goes on. "If you love only those who love you, what reward is that?" He's using honor, shame language here. "Don't even the tax collectors do the same?" They know how to network and befriend the people who will benefit them and they'll benefit them. That kind of thing. "If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than anybody else? That's what everybody does. That's what the non-Israelites do."

Jon: We're called to something greater.

Tim: "So, therefore, you be" most of our English translations read "perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Jon: Teleioi.

Tim: Yes, teleioi. Without gaps. Without cracks, or fissures or gaps.

Jon: Complete?

Tim: Complete. Solomon made the temple out of complete stones. Whole. Apparently being a whole human, truly human.

Jon: A human with no fissures and gaps and cracks.

Tim: Yeah, is one who truly imitates the generosity of the Heavenly Father.

Jon: Life that is truly life.

Tim: Here, it's a little bit different than the raven and the flowers teaching where it's like foster the abundance mindset. Here it's foster the indiscriminate generosity, and care. Because that's how the abundance of creations ordered to share generosity with indiscriminately, unless humans start discriminating. And then that creates the world he's critiquing right here which is you share and love only those who will benefit you.

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Jon: This is kind of what happens in Lame Is Rob, Jean Valjean. He's the enemy in the story.

Tim: That's right. He's the convict.

Jon: He shouldn't get rewarded for what he does. He steals.

Tim: He's given an unconditioned gift.

Jon: But he treats it as a gift that needs to change the way he lives.

Tim: Yeah, that's exactly right. This is "love your neighbor as yourself and love your enemies." This is a hallmark of Jesus's concept of the new humanity and the kingdom of God. And it's not just for him a good ethical teaching, it's the way to be human that we've apparently lost. It's the way that we're meant to be because that's

the way that God is. It's the way that God has operated in this whole story so far. He keeps giving gifts to people who don't love Him.

Jon: To people that are seemingly enemies to Him and His ways.

Tim: This teaching is a way of thinking about the whole story of Jesus himself, and what he represents. That he's here to be that complete human on behalf of a humanity that has failed to be the humans that God called them to be. So he is that, and he indiscriminately dispenses God's generosity and love to the tax collectors, and prostitutes, and fishermen, and Pharisees that he met. He just shares God's generosity with all of them.

Jon: It's interesting. A scarcity mentality, we don't trust the host, leads on one end of the spectrum to enslaving people - enslaving your enemies. And then you get this end of the spectrum where Jesus saying, "Pray for and love your enemies." It's the ultimate generous act. You have to really believe there is abundance and there is enough if you're going to try to hook up your enemies.

Tim: Yeah, that's right.

Jon: You really have to believe it.

Tim: Yeah, that's true. That's a good way of putting it. If you don't, you won't share in love.

Jon: Because those are the first people who are going to turn on you.

Tim: Yeah, that's right.

Jon: As soon as there's not enough, those are the first people that are going to take what they need at the expense of you. They're your enemies.

Tim: Yes, that's right. So think, Jesus is giving a teaching here that is itself a summary of his whole life and mission.

Jon: Yeah, right.

Tim: As we're going to see, this is how the apostles came to talk about. They use the language of this teaching to talk about the meaning of Jesus. He was the gift of God's own love to Israel and humanity, to God's own enemies, His own people who would become his enemies. And what did they do with the gift? They kill him? It's sort of like when you meet somebody who's just so awesome, and generous, and amazing that both you're basking in the goodness of their just kindness and generosity, but also it exposes inside your own self that you're not like that, and then there's shame or guilt. I guess that'd be a self-aware response.

Another response would be resentment, suspicion...

Jon: Something's off.

Tim: Some strings attached here.

Jon: "I can't actually trust this person here."

Tim: "Yeah, they're not really. They can't really be. Nobody's like this." It's sort of like sometimes people's generosity and kindness magnifies my own screwed up, distorted self. There's something like that in the story being told in the gospels where Jesus exposes the bankruptcy of Israel at that moment. And so his loving generosity and his confidence to critique Israel's lack of generosity and love is what gets him killed.

This is that thing you were just talking about. If you give gifts to your enemies, there's a chance it won't change them. It won't do what the gift did to Jean Valjean.

Jon: Sure.

Tim: It won't change them.

Jon: It won't change them. And then when the rubber hits the road and there's not enough, they're the first ones that are going to turn to you.

Tim: That's right. It's an interesting way to think about what's happening on the cross.

Jon: So, coupled with this kind of freedom in the generous life, generous mindset, comes also an expectation, or maybe it seems like you should expect but at the same time, you will suffer the way Jesus suffers.

Tim: You'll be taken advantage of.

Jon: I'll be taken advantage of. This isn't like a life hack that's going to make sure your life is going to be awesome. This isn't like, be generous and now you're going to experience the life you've always dreamed.

Tim: Yeah, totally. It sure it didn't for Jesus.

Jon: It didn't for Jesus. Man, for a lot of the first followers of Jesus, man, rough go.

Tim: Totally. If your definition of the good life is simply on the level of economic security and prosperity, and a stable social web, then this mindset did not produce that for Jesus or for the apostles.

Jon: No.

Tim: So there's must be some other frame of reference.

Jon: Because part of me wants to go, "Oh, and then you will actually get a stable life you've always wanted." It's not guaranteed in this.

Tim: You might. You might.

Jon: You might.

Tim: You could generate that.

Jon: I feel like God's given that to me. I feel very secure. It's like the danger of abundance is very clear in my life of making sure it doesn't turn me into my own...

Tim: Nebuchadnezzar.

Jon: Nebuchadnezzar.

Tim: Yeah, totally. I think that's the unique moment in human history that is the middle class, the upper-middle...even much of what we call the lower class in western capitalist democracies, it is a material abundance.

Jon: And I do practice generosity. But as I do, and I think...

Tim: It's still a danger.

Jon: Yeah. It's not a foolproof plan to make sure there won't be bad stuff in your life. Like, who knows what will happen?

Tim: Yeah, that's right. Apparently, the good life for Jesus actually has very little to do with your economic situation. Clearly, for him, that there's some other definition of the good life that he's showing and that the Jesus movement is after. It might give you security. Oh, if it gives you security, it'll be on a different level than economic security.

Jon: Okay, this is why I brought up the shrewd manager too. He gets a different kind of security. The security is now in the relationships, right?

Tim: Yeah. You're talking about Jesus' parable of the shrewd manager?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: He knows he's going to get fired so he literally rewrites the accounts.

Jon: He just decides to be radically generous to all...

Tim: He cooks the books. He already knows that he's not trusted so he does one last act of trustworthiness, which is to rewrite the book...

Jon: To be generous to all these people.

Tim: ...so that all these relationships will...

Jon: It's a new security.

Tim: That's right.

Jon: I've thought about that before in terms of if I'm too generous, or if things go poorly in life, even despite of my generosity or lack of it, ultimately, what is the thing that brings the most security? It's the love of community around you who will love you like they love themselves. That's the kind of community that is built out of generosity.

Tim: That's right. And I think that is the outgrowth of a teaching like Jesus that we just read, where if you're not only loving the people in your tribe that you're supposed to benefit, and they're supposed to benefit you, that's how that network operates, but then if you even begin to spread kindness and generosity outside of that circle, it breaks the spiral of hostility between tribal groups and it extends the family. It's like you're extending the family. You're treating people like family who are technically your family.

Jon: Right.

Tim: That's how the apostles come to talk about the story of Jesus as a whole. Here's three lines from the Gospel of John and the letters of John. One of them's really famous. John 3:16. "God so loved the world." In the Gospel of John, the world is for the most part hostile to God and His purposes. So the world that God is loving is a world that hates and rejects and ultimately will kill.

Jon: What's the Greek word there for "world"?

Tim: Kosmos.

Jon: Kosmos?

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: So he loves the universe?

Tim: Well, kosmos is connected to the word "cosmetics." Kosmos means just to bring order to.

Jon: Oh, the ordered..."

Tim: The ordered world. Yeah, the kosmos.

Jon: Cool.

Tim: So God loves the kosmos so much that He gave His one and only Son so that the one who believes in Him won't perish but have life of the age - life of the New Age.

Jon: Eternal life is how it's translated.

Tim: Usually translated. That's right.

Jon: But literally it's life of the age.

Tim: Yeah, life of the age, which Jewish thinking there's this age and the age to come.

Jon: The age of death.

Tim: Yeah. He's talking about the life of the next stage that has begun already. In other words, this little one-liner is summarizing the meaning of Jesus' life, death and

resurrection in the language of generosity and giving. God gave to his enemies. It's exactly what Jesus said on the Sermon on the Mount.

Jon: Because the kosmos is in rebellion against him.

Tim: Yeah, kosmos is selfish. It's arena of death, and what God does is give a great gift. And embedded in there is...

Jon: The world that he ordered has created a disorder.

Tim: Yeah, hijacked.

Jon: Hijacked into disorder and chaos.

Tim: It's the pool room in our parable. God's response to the death and destruction of the world that He orders and that He loves is to give it a gift. I think this is such a great way of thinking about the calling of Abraham in response to Babylon in Genesis 11:12.

Jon: He gave Abraham a gift.

Tim: Yeah. Or the response of Genesis 3:15 of the promise of a future descendant who will crush the snake in response to humans eating from the tree. It continues to give gifts that sows the seeds of a new creation. 1 John 3 "See how great a love the Father has given to us that we would be called children of God." That is what we are. The language of gift-giving is really important in the Gospel and letters of John. It's a key motif for him. All this giving language is his gift-giving terminology.

So you were sons of or children of Adam, children of death and children of selfishness, children of the evil one, but God gives just straight-up gift, unconditioned gift. Again, this is short form. Well, how do you become children of God? Through the story of Jesus. How did that happen? God becomes human to be the human we're meant to be but failed to be. He dies for us and gives us his life and sonship as a gift. That's what he means.

Jon: Right. That's the shorthand.

Tim: He can pack all of that into just God loves us and gave us a gift to be God's children.

Jon: Part of that gift too is then God's Spirit empowering this right to be able to live that way.

Tim: Bringing us into the life and love of the Father and the Son. The language of gift-giving permeates the letters of Paul. There's a famous passage in Romans 8:31. He says, "What should we say in response to all this? If God is for us, who is against us?"

Jon: My enemies.

Tim: Yeah, totally. "The one who didn't spare his own Son but gave him over for us all, he also freely gift us with everything." Dude, he's got so many Hebrew Bible stories in

his mind. You can see it coming out. You didn't spare your own son. That's Isaac and Abraham's story. Exactly the phrase from Isaac and Abraham except now God is the Abraham figure and Jesus is the Isaac figure. So the agony and trust that Abraham had experienced as he trusted his son to God, only to receive him back, so to speak, is a framework for thinking about the father handing over the son as...

Jon: It seems like he's also saying here, you know, if you can't trust that God is a generous host, look what He did with this gift of his Son. If that can't get you there to place of trust that He's a generous host, then what else can get you there?

Tim: That's right. Paul's persuasion here is to say yeah, you can trust God as the ultimate gift giver to give us the new creation? How can I trust that? Well, look what he did with his most precious gift to us, which is to let us kill, let us bring death into his own life and love in the heartbeat between the father and the son?

Jon: It's a great verse.

Tim: Oh, dude, if God is for us, who is against us? I mean, that is inspirational.

Jon: It is.

Tim: But what does he mean by God if for us?

Jon: Well, as you unpack that into "I can trust a new creation," which means I can live like it's begun.

Tim: I can live like there is truly enough.

Jon: And I can live like there's truly enough.

Tim: That's right. If the resurrection of Jesus means that the new creation has broken in and arrive, if I live in a scarcity mindset, that's because I've forgotten the goodness of the resurrection of new creation.

Jon: That's cool.

Tim: It's really cool. Think about this phrase from the letter of James, Jesus' brother. "Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow." Now I'm plucking this out of context. It actually comes in a sequence, it's really cool in James 1. But it's also a good one-liner, both because of the gift imagery, but also the Genesis 1 imagery.

Jon: Father of lights.

Tim: Now, the Father of lights.

Jon: That he created the sun, moon, and stars. So what that's...

Tim: Yeah. And what's their other name?

Jon: Elohim. The sons of God.

Tim: The sons of Elohim. The hosts of heaven can be called in Hebrew the sons of Elohim - the sons of God. But then he says, God's a creator of the lights, and they are part of this family - spiritual beings meant to image him and so on, but one thing about the host of heaven is they're constantly moving around, their brightness fades and shines, they twinkle, they vary, we're shifting shadow. I think he's talking here about the movements and the twinkling of the stars. Their glory fades in and out. And their father is not like that. He's...

Jon: Constant brightens.

Tim: He's constant life and light. So that's his framework. Then out of that glorious life and light comes to us... And then you use this gift language. Every good thing that we receive in God's good world is a gift coming from the ultimate eternal source of life and light. This is such a great line, that you can tell he just thought about Genesis 1 for days and days and days.

Jon: He looked at the stars, he saw them twinkly. He thought about the nature of God who created the stars.

Tim: He had a good cup of whatever tea he drank back then. He saw his children playing.

He heard his children laughing, he saw the sunrise, and he's just like, "What a gift?" And every breath, everything, it's all a gift. It's a beautiful view of the world if you have the faith to trust that it's true.

Jon: Yeah, which can be hard to believe, especially when life is sucking.

Tim: Which it does for a lot of people a lot of the time.

[00:33:57]

Jon: But what is the solution to that is to generously love others to alleviate suffering.

Tim: Yes. So let that turn us to the last place I want us to focus here.

Jon: Great.

Tim: All this biblical theology of gift-giving, generosity in the midst of hardship, there's two chapters in Paul's letters, where he just... it's like it all comes together in a beautiful set of chapters. It's in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. We've talked about this I think. This chapter is related to Paul's...one of his big projects, which was to raise money to give...

Jon: To the poor in Jerusalem?

Tim: Correct. Yeah, exactly. So there was a famine that hit Judea.

Jon: Famine's happen.

Tim: Famine's happen, a lot of people hitting hard times, and so Paul gets all of these church plants that's full of all these non-Jewish people to raise money and give it as a gift to their spiritual ancestors, so to speak, the Messianic Jews in Jerusalem. Here's the backstory. In 1 Corinthians, he ends the letter saying, "Hey, you guys, remember when I was there we talked about how every week you're going to be setting aside money when you gather for worship in the meal? You're going to set aside money to save up because I'm going to come or I'm going to send somebody to come and collect it pretty soon, and then take it to Jerusalem."

Jon: That's what this is about?

Tim: He told them that in 1 Corinthians.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And then what he's discovered as we're going to see is that they haven't been saving up. And so he's in a difficult situation. Because what he needs to tell them as their church planting founder is, "Dude, be generous and save up the money. You said you were going to do it anyway, so why haven't you been doing it?" But Paul's normal tactic is not to leverage his authority and just bring the hammer. He always uses a loving type of persuasion because that's what God did with him.

Watch how he navigates this. It's fascinating. 2 Corinthians 8. "So brothers and sisters, I want to tell you about the grace of God that has been given to the churches of Macedonia." Let's just pause. The word "grace" in Greek is the word "charis." It is the same word as gift.

Jon: There's no other word?

Tim: Well, there actually are some other words for "gift" but the word "charis" as a noun is the word "gift." Then, as a verb, "charizomai" is the word to give a gift. It's also the most common word in the New Testament for "forgive."

Jon: Forgive.

Tim: To forgive. To forgive someone when they wrong you is to give them the gift of forgiveness. So the very concept of forgiveness in Greek New Testament...

Jon: Is generosity.

Tim: ...is generosity. Gift giving. We give each other gifts.

Jon: And the word "grace" is the word "gift."

Tim: Yeah. So he's going to use this word "charis" to mean a few different things here, but it's all connected.

Jon: Same word. Okay.

Tim: So some gift has been given. I'm just going to use the word "gift." "I want to make known to you the gift of God that's been given to the churches in Macedonia." Oh, did they get some money?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: "In a great deal, or in a great ordeal of affliction, their abundance of joy, and their deep poverty overflowed in wealth and liberality. I'm telling you, beyond their ability they gave of their own accord to put their money in the pot. In fact, they were begging us, urging us, for the gift of participating in this act of service to the saints in Jerusalem."

Jon: They thought it was a gift to be able to give?

Tim: Yes. It says in vs 5 "We were not expecting this." But here's what they did. First, they gave themselves to the Lord and then they gave themselves to us by the will of God. Notice that he's using "gift" and "giving" in all these creative ways here. So you tell me...

Jon: You didn't highlight the word "gave" there.

Tim: I should have.

Jon: But you should have. Okay, got it.

Tim: Yeah, totally. He's doing a little shame on you to the Corinthians.

Jon: It's a little shame on you. That's what I was going to say.

Tim: He totally is. That's exactly what you're doing there.

Jon: These guys in Macedonia, they're afflicted and they're poor. But in spite of that, they gave a crazy, generous gift that we didn't even expect, because we're like, "These guys are poor. Why would they give us this money?"

Tim: "We're not going to ask them to give, because we know they have nothing."

Jon: And they did it and it was even beyond what they should be capable of doing. But for them, it was their honor. Like they found it a gift to them to be able to do it.

Tim: It was a gift to them.

Jon: In their mindset.

Tim: Yeah. In their mindset, it was a gift. They received a gift by having the chance to give a gift.

Jon: Greater to give than to receive. It's interesting he says, "They gave themselves first to the Lord and to us." That you can't be this kind of generous person if you haven't already given your life over. Like that's the first step of generosity is like you have to

give yourself over to a new king. Anew mentality and of not scarcity and of believing in a generous host, that then becomes...

Tim: ...the motivator. That's right.

Jon: It's cool.

Tim: It's really cool. It gets even cooler in vs 7. "Listen, just as you guys, Corinthians, just as you guys overflow in everything: in faith in utterances and knowledge and earnestness in love that we inspired in you..." So he's saying, "Listen, you guys are pretty awesome followers of Jesus."

Jon: He's buttering them up.

Tim: Yeah, totally. It's like, "You trust God. Hey, you're really smart, a lot of educated theologians there, you're earnest, see to that you abound in this gift also. This gift that I just talked about in the Macedonians, I would love to see you grow in this area too." Then he says, "Listen, I'm not speaking a command."

Jon: Like, you don't have to do this. You don't have to give to this charity effort that raising money for.

Tim: Correct. "I'm not going to command you to do it."

Jon: This is Paul, the development officer right now.

Tim: It is. Totally. Totally. Look what he says. He says - and this is the New American Standard translation, which I'm kind of going to summarize. English is a bit difficult here - "I'm not giving you a command but I'm giving you a chance to prove through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love too." So I just gave you this example of the earnestness of others and now I'm telling you, you have a chance...

Jon: To step up to the plate.

Tim: To step up to the plate and prove your love too.

Jon: You don't have to do it. But if you don't, I'm not sure if you really love God.

Tim: Comparing them to the earnestness of others, his point is actually he's exalting the Macedonians and saying, "I told you about them because I want you to prove that you are just as generous and affected by the love of God as them."

Jon: This can seem a little sneaky or manipulative, which I'm I think I'm reading in from my linguistic background a little bit...

Tim: Oh, I see.

Jon: ...but there is something about seeing someone else's radically generous life that is very motivating.

Tim: Yeah, totally.

Jon: You hear someone's story, you see someone do something and then you see the joy that came out of it, and that is incredibly motivating.

Tim: That's right. Factor number one. Factor number two is that these are people Paul has known for years. These are people that he never asked a penny from when he was living and starting the church. He funded his own church planting efforts by making tents. Recently they've just had a huge conflict, and they just wrote to him. He talks about it earlier in this very letter that they wrote and said they were sorry, and then he forgives them. So he's got history with these people and so he can just get right to it. You know what I'm saying?

Jon: He doesn't have to beat around the bush?

Tim: We're listening in on a conversation between very close people.

Jon: Got it.

Tim: He's pouring on the rhetoric here because he knows he can.

Jon: He's gained their trust.

Tim: Totally. That's important. That's important.

Jon: Got it.

Tim: To me, then this is the heartbeat. So he says, "You're growing in all these other areas, I want you to grow in this grace too. I'm giving you a chance to prove that you're as awesome as I know you are." Vs 9 "For you know the gift." There's our grace word again. "You know the gift of our Lord Jesus Messiah, that even though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor so that you through his poverty might become rich." He's summarizing the narrative of the story of Jesus in economic gift giving.

Jon: Through the theme of generosity.

Tim: Through the theme of generosity. Because the word "grace" is the word "gift, generous gift." In other words, our concept of generous gift is what the word "grace" means in the New Testament.

Jon: Because of the generous gift, the Lord Jesus Christ, he was rich, he had everything he could want. He had the love of our Father.

Tim: He's reflecting on pre-incarnate Jesus.

Jon: Yeah. He had the love of the Father.

Tim: Security. Status. Power.

Jon: Yeah, everything you'd want. But he wanted something more, which was us and our hearts. So for that, he gave up his status.

Tim: Correct. He becomes poor. This is same idea, different vocabulary as in Philippians 2, where he says he was in his very nature God, but he didn't consider his equality with God something to be grabbed, to be taken or used for his own advantage. It doesn't just mean to take, he has it, but something to be grasped and used for his own advantage. Rather, he emptied himself.

Jon: He saw his abundance as an opportunity to be generous.

Tim: Correct. That's right.

Jon: That's the family ethic to see your abundance as an opportunity to be generous to others.

Tim: That's right. So that they can experience the thing that I experience.

Jon: Which then it snowballs, you do that, and then those who are poor become rich.

Tim: Become right through poverty. And notice, think up to the Macedonians, he's also playing this off the Macedonian story that they're acting like Jesus. In their poverty, they're making others rich. And similar to Jesus, the irony is that he was rich and then chose to become poor...

Jon: To make others rich.

Tim: ...so that through his poverty...what upside-down world the kingdom of God is.

Jon: What a backwards way to try to find security and life.

[00:45:27]

Tim: So, 2 Corinthians 8:9 is beautiful. It's a one-liner of Paul's that captures the essence of the story of Jesus through the language of gift-giving and generosity. His point is, material generosity is the only reasonable response to the gift that has been given us in the life of Jesus. If you aren't materially sharing with others, it shows there's a deep disconnect in how you think about the Christian faith. I think it's what he is saying.

Jon: Which means all of us have a deep disconnect with how we think about the Christian faith. Because who doesn't struggle with materialism?

Tim: Totally. That brings us all the way back to I think that's why generosity and scarcity themes are right there in Genesis 3 is because it's part of the human condition. Is there enough? To people who have more than enough, they're sitting there wondering, "Is there enough?" If there's not, maybe there's not enough, I need to do something about that. And that's how it all get started. It makes sense, then, that the solution to that in Jesus is another act of generous, abundant giving.

Jon: The generous gift of Jesus shouldn't leave you going, "Is there enough?" The generous gift of Jesus should do what Romans 8 said: if God wouldn't spare his own Son, then why would he withhold anything? There is enough.

Tim: That's exactly right. So being a follower of Jesus involves a lot of things, but one of them is trusting that in the life of Jesus I have been given the ultimate gift. It includes that my own failures and sins have been accounted for in Jesus' death on my behalf. That the death that I've introduced into the world through my selfishness and hoarding and whatever sin that that's dealt with on the cross. But equally important to that story and to the gift is the resurrection and the dawn of the new creation - the birth of the new creation, where there is enough for me and for everybody. That's what the resurrection means. And so it's cultivating that alternative view of reality.

Jon: Because ultimately, what are we scared of with scarcity? Ultimately, we're scared of death.

Tim: That's right.

Jon: And so resurrection proves that that actually isn't the final enemy. That isn't something to be scared of.

Tim: That's exactly right. Yeah, death. Which is why Paul will go on in Romans 8 after the thing that he quotes and he says, "I'm convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels or powers (so spiritual powers), the things present or the things to come, the present or the future, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing can separate us from the love of God which is in Messiah Jesus, our Lord." Dude, Romans 8.

What you just said is what he's getting poetic about in Romans 8. It's the most difficult thing to do to foster that alternative view of the world, the abundance mindset.

Jon: But it is the family ethic.

Tim: The family ethic.

Jon: I like to use that phrase. Like stuck.

Tim: From Matthew 5, of Heavenly Father?

Jon: Yeah. I look at my Father, His sun shines on, people who are good and bad - deserve it and don't deserve it. The family ethic is one of abundant generosity to everyone, your friends and your enemies.

Tim: That's right. Maybe there's something in the video where we can use color or some kind of... Remember how in the Exile video we had Babylon and exile represented by dark blue maze, and then home was gold world?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: There's something similar here too where the world of scarcity is invaded by the generous gift that begins to create abundant Eden right here in the midst.

Jon: It's the reverse infection.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. Yeah, totally.

Jon: It's the yeast in the dough.

Tim: And you can actually participate and experience new creation abundance when you share. I don't share as often as I would like to think that I would. But I have had those experiences where you're like, "This is awesome. this person's stoked, I am stoked." And there's some vibe happening here where for this moment, there's enough. And there's a connection here and we both feel safe and accepted. This is awesome. I wish every moment could be like this, and then it's not.

Jon: And then it's not. I've kind of hung on to the phrase of trying to be uncomfortably generous. Because when I think of the phrase like "radically generous" or I think I'm like the way the bullseye of generosity of just this crazy mentality, it feels impossible. But what I can do is be generous to a level that does make me feel uncomfortable. And then what I find is that there's life there, and then to keep pressing the boundaries of that comfortability. And that's different for everyone in different seasons.

Tim: That's right.

Jon: It's just a nice way to tiptoe into generosity.

Tim: Man, I met this family once, at a church I worked at. I think we did a generosity season of like teaching series and other projects at the church. There was this family who shared their story with me, where they just created a little separate savings account among all their other accounts and they just did auto transfers from that throughout the year.

Jon: Tristen and I had a season like that. My business was like really booming, and we just set up a savings, a checking account, and we just transferred money into it automatically, certain percentage, and then we get to give away that one.

Tim: So then they would just enter a season after it was to a certain amount where they would just start praying as a family, like, "Lord, show us who to give this to."

Jon: That's awesome.

Tim: Cool stuff happened. Then they would he would hear about a situation and be like, "Hey, we have some money to give for that." I just thought that it was a really practical. The point is it was practical. It still was spontaneous but it was spontaneous because they had planned for it.

Jon: There's a pastor, Chip Ingram. Is that right? Yeah, Chip. Great guy. But he gave this talk, and in it he told a story. It's really stuck with me. He said while he was here in ministry, there was this older patron friend who's a wealthy friend. The wealthy friend set up a checking account and gave Chip a book of checks of that account. He said, "Hey, I'm going to put money in this checking account. What I want you to do with this checkbook is just while you're a pastor, if someone needs money, just use this." And that's all he told him.

And Chip didn't know like, how much money would be in this account. I think he knew how much was in it, but he didn't know what would happen when he spent it

all. Was that it? He just walked around with this checkbook, and it totally changed the way he interacted. Almost every experience was now just like this opportunity of "Maybe I can be generous here" because he had this guy's checkbook.

As he was telling that story, I realized what he was really talking about, which was like, that's how we should be living. That's the mentality of like, "This is as all God's. He's given us the checkbook, and that's how we should be thinking about life."

Tim: That's good.

Jon: That really stuck with me.

Tim: Isn't that interesting how the sayings of Jesus become so over-familiar. Because that's what totally Jesus' point about look at the ravens, look at the flowers, look at the sun, look at the rain. But somehow, it becomes so religiousified. I just made that up. Religiousified. It becomes so religious, that we can't hear it in its full power anymore. And so it requires new parables. That's right.

What a remarkable mindset. Because this isn't just like give because it's the right thing to do or give because you ought to. It's a totally different story that on the surface can result in what looks like the same behavior being generous with your time and resource. But the Jewish Christian story underneath that is a completely different mindset that actually looks foolish from a scarcity mentality.

Jon: Thanks for listening to this episode of The Bible Project podcast. Next week, we are going to host a question and response discussing these four episodes on generosity. So if you have any questions, we'd love to hear it from you. You can record yourself and email your question to info@jointhebibleproject.com. If you can try to keep your question to about 20 seconds and let us know your name and where you're from, that'd be awesome. Again, it's info@jointhebibleproject.com.

Today's show is produced by Dan Gummel. Our theme music comes from the band Tents. We're a crowdfunded nonprofit in Portland, Oregon, and you can find all of our resources, including our new efforts to translate our videos into many different languages. It's all free and available at thebibleproject.com. Thanks for being a part of this with us.

Madison: Hi, my name is Madison and I'm from Washington, I first read about The Bible Project from my grandfather and I use The Bible Project for my school work. My favorite part is the pictures are really beautiful, and I like how the Hebrew words, how I learn about them. We believe the Bible is a unified story that leads to Jesus. We're crowdfunded projects by people like me. Find free videos, study notes, podcast, and more at thebibleproject.com.