

MY GENEROUS LIFE
FOR CONNECT GROUPS
WEEK 3



THOMPSON STATION CHURCH

ACTS 10:1-4; LUKE 8:1-3

WEEK 3

PREPARATION

- > Spend the week reading through and studying Acts 10:1-4 and Luke 8:1-3. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools (such as a concordance or Bible dictionary) to enhance your preparation.
- > Determine which discussion points and questions will work best with your group.
- > Pray for our pastor, the upcoming group meeting, your teaching, your group members, and their receptivity to the study.

HIGHLIGHTS

BIBLICAL EMPHASIS: God calls us to become consistent in following Him in generous giving.

TEACHING AIM: I will become faithful by giving monthly.

MEMORY VERSE: ⁶ Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. ⁷ Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:6-7, NIV).

MEMORY VERSE: Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share (1 Timothy 6:18, NIV).

GENEROUS ATTRIBUTES

Cause Giver. A person who is faithful to respond to a need when God calls.

Consistent Giver. A person who is faithful by giving monthly.

Committed Giver. A person who is faithful in their generosity by tithing to their home church.

Courageous Giver. A person who is faithful by giving beyond the tithe.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

- 1 Were you a part of a family that consistently gave? How has this affected your view of giving?

- 2 It may surprise you to know that most studies conducted into giving habits of American Christians show as few as 10-25% of church attendees give to the church consistently. How could investing our gifts through the church maximize our impact?

- 3 What else would God be able to do through His people if they would give regularly? Through our church specifically?

It is one thing to give to a cause, but it is another to give consistently irrespective of a specific need. Though the Bible says much about giving consistently, a surprising number of American Christians do not regularly give to the church. Imagine all God might do if His people were consistent givers! All currently planned mission work would be fully funded. Building campaigns would be unnecessary. Out of a desire for obedience and to see God's kingdom flourish, we must turn our hearts toward giving and make it a regular habit. God does not need our money to accomplish His mission; after all, He owns all things and has all power. However, God uses our faithful giving to shape our hearts and make us more like Him.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> Have a volunteer read Acts 10:1-4.

- Who was Cornelius? What do we learn about him from the opening 2 verses? What is exceptional about him?

- How did Cornelius respond to the angel? How do you imagine he must have felt?

Notes:

Cornelius was a devout, respectful, giving, and praying man. Though not a Jew, he was a worshiper of God. A centurion would have commanded around 600 soldiers, and he would have been paid very well. Cornelius was a prominent man socially and financially. The angel appears to him at the ninth hour, or about 3 p.m., which was the traditional Jewish hour for prayer. Although Cornelius was a God-fearer and extremely devout, he was not saved. Cornelius's prayers and acts of charity prompted God's further revelation to him through Peter (vv. 5-6), which would lead to his and his family's salvation.

- Have someone read Hebrews 11:6. How did Cornelius model this verse? What happened as a result?
- How is giving consistently evidence of both the faithfulness of the Lord and His work in our lives?
- How did the Lord bless Cornelius as a result of his praise and faithful giving?
- In what ways is giving an act of worship?

Cornelius loved God not only with his heart, but also with his wallet. The evidence Luke gave to support this claim to Cornelius's devotion to the God of Israel was that "he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly." Cornelius understood who God was and responded to God by giving consistently to His mission in the world. He saw beyond specific needs and made generosity a regular part of his life.

> Have a volunteer read Luke 8:1-3.

Notes:

- What does it mean when someone says he or she is going to “live within their means”? What does it mean to give according to your means?
- How did these women serve Jesus with their lives? Why should our giving always include our service?
- What does it teach us about these women that they served and gave monetarily? How does their example apply to us?
- What motivated these women to give? What should motivate us to give regularly?

“Means” refers to ability. Giving is about taking a portion of the money you earn and putting it to use for God’s kingdom work. When we learn to give consistently, we are able to do so because our perspective on what we have changes. These women were faithful in both service and monetary giving. This is an exemplary response to Jesus. Where you spend your money reveals your heart (Luke 12:34). These women had been directly impacted by the person and work of Jesus Christ. In response to God’s faithfulness, they gave their lives and resources as an act of worship.

- In what sense is all giving proportional? How does this help us give more freely without guilt or grief?
- When we view everything we have as a gift from God, how does that impact our generosity?

Notes:

Because giving is proportional and not a set amount, everyone is able to give. Additionally, if your income increased but your cost of living does not increase, you have the opportunity to give more. None of us should feel guilty about the amount we give because most all of us are able to give. Cornelius and the women in Luke show us that generosity is a habit of the heart more than a consistent amount given.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passages apply directly to their lives.

- 1 Do you wish to be more generous than you are right now? What steps can you take to give more regularly?

- 2 What other areas of life can we benefit from consistency? How can we help one another as a group be consistent in more areas of our lives?

- 3 What is one ministry of Thompson Station Church that could benefit from our more consistent giving? What would God be able to do with our resources if all people gave more consistently? TSClife.org/missions-resources to learn more!

90-DAY ACTION STEPS

Use these steps to help your groups process the truth from this lesson in an ongoing way.

Notes:

1 Learn: I will register to attend a money management group such as *Financial Peace*.

2 Pray: I will trust God to provide for me as I give monthly what I have purposed in my heart to give. "Thank You, Lord, for blessing me in all ways at all times with more than I need. Lead me to live faithfully, give generously, share joyfully, and look expectantly toward my future."

3 Respond:

I will commit to lead my household in a weekly devotional, such as *The Family Project Devotional eBook* (TSClife.org/90day)

I will partner with TSC to minister through missions and serving.

I will set up online giving (TSClife.org/90day) and commit to a 90-Day giving challenge.

PRAY

Thank You, Lord, for blessing me in all ways, at all times, with more than I need. Lead me to live faithfully, give generously, share joyfully, and look expectantly toward my future. Lord, help me grow to give consistently.

ACTS 10:1-4

Often, though not always, when God decides to extend the work of the gospel beyond its present boundaries, he targets people of influence. In Acts 6:7 a large number of priests became obedient to the faith. In chapter 8, the treasurer of a distant nation, cabinet member to a queen, trusted Christ. In chapter 9, God chose a persecuting rabbi and transformed him into the apostle to the Gentiles.

Notes:

Here Luke introduces us to a military leader, a noncommissioned officer who had worked his way up through the ranks to the status of centurion, somewhat parallel to a captain in the American army today. He commanded a regiment, one-tenth of a legion (6,000 men). We would expect Cornelius to be in charge of three hundred to six hundred men called a cohort. Not everyone agrees with this analysis however, and some would apply the strict meaning of centurion, leader of one hundred. In either case, he is a man of influence in an influential city, a Gentile soldier serving a city composed dominantly of Gentiles. Caesarea experienced significant friction between that majority and the minority Jewish population.

This centurion was no ordinary Roman soldier. He was deeply religious and actually performed two out of three Jewish acts of piety—prayer and giving of alms. One commentator refers to Cornelius as a “rough Roman soldier,” but nothing in the text suggests that. Probably most Roman soldiers behaved like those in Pilate’s Hall. Not this one! He had been appointed to a very sophisticated post in a city committed to cultural activity and the arts. Whether there or prior to coming we do not know, he embraced the Jewish faith and supported the Jewish community. Not only that, but his entire family and all his household servants worshiped the Lord. Likely, he was not a formal proselyte to the Jewish religion, but a pious man who worshiped a monotheistic God.

We know from the text that God sent Cornelius a vision during his afternoon worship. Again, Luke’s words are fascinatingly precise: He distinctly saw an angel of God. Commonly in Luke’s writings, God uses prayer time to lead His people on to new vistas of ministry (Luke 3:21-22; 6:12-16; 9:18-22,28-31; 22:39-46;

Acts 1:14; 13:1-3). As in chapter 3 where Peter and John encountered important ministry at the temple gate, we see here again that good things happen to those who worship regularly.

Luke leaves us no room to doubt that God takes total control of everything that happens in this account. Both Cornelius and Peter behave in normal ways, and God interrupts their lives with this double vision as we have already seen with Ananias and Saul, a sovereign plan to bring them together.

The appearance of angels, whether in a vision or in person (Acts 1), tends to get one's attention. Luke uses one of his favorite words here (*atenizo*) to depict Cornelius staring at this heavenly apparition. The word appears 14 times in the New Testament, 12 from the pen of Luke. The angel addressed him by name. His response was not dramatically different from that of Saul on the road to Damascus. He was a devout worshiper, still lost in sin and headed for hell. Yet he had enough spiritual sensitivity to treat a messenger from God with dignity and respect, a most appropriate reaction to divine revelation of any kind.

Notes:

LUKE 8:1-3

Luke's orderly account of Jesus' ministry (1:3) does not always locate Jesus precisely. In chapter 7, He was in Capernaum (v. 1), Nain (v. 11) and in a Pharisee's house in an unnamed locality (v. 36). Now He begins a nomadic ministry through the towns and villages, presumably of Galilee, fulfilling the purpose of His ministry explained in 4:43-44: preaching the kingdom to other towns. What follows in this chapter and beyond are examples of how Jesus and His followers preached the kingdom so everyone could hear. Luke has one specific emphasis. Jesus did not select men exclusively as His followers. A central core of women also accompanied Him. They did more than the feminine household tasks. They provided much of the financial support Jesus needed to lead such a squad of followers from town to town.

Mary Magdalene (from the unidentified city of Magdala) had good reason to follow Jesus. He had exorcised demons from her, transforming her life from a person totally possessed to an individual totally pursuing committed discipleship. She would be

among the first witnesses at the empty tomb (cf. Matt. 28:1,9-10; Mark 15:40,47; 16:1; Luke 24:10; John 20:11-18). Joanna appears elsewhere only in Luke 24:10 at the empty tomb. Married to a major official in Herod's government, she may have supplied much of the means for Jesus' ministry. She apparently was a person who left home for the sake of the kingdom (18:29). Mention of her husband's position also provides contrast to the response of Herod himself (9:7-8). Susanna appears only here in the Bible.

Notes: