

Introduction: God's Generosity

Flash survey: Who here sees yourself as a generous person? A few years back, I asked a congregation this same question and somehow it turned into a “crucial conversation” when after the service, a worshiper came up to me and offered, “I didn’t raise my hand when you asked about generosity but you need to know that I am an extremely generous person.” Because I knew the kind of car he drove and the plush neighborhood in which he lived, I took the liberty and asked, “And how generous are you?” He said, “Every year I give \$1000 to the church.” I asked, “And how much do you make a year?” “Six figures” he volunteered “and my wife makes just as much.” I asked, “Are you familiar with Malachi 3:10? He smirked, “It’s like a divine tax where God tells us we got to give 10% to the church. “But I don’t do that 10% thing” and then he rattled off a bunch of reasons why. When he finished I asked, “Are you good at math?” He said “Yea, my job depends on it.” I then asked, “If the Bible defines generosity as giving over the tithe and if you make \$100,000 and are giving God \$1000 are you being \$1000 generous or \$9,000 cheap?” He said, “\$9,000 cheap but I never calculated it that way.” I said, “Most don’t, which is why the church is full of folk who may think themselves generous but are actually not.” He walked away chagrined and confused.

We launched our “Amazing Church” series last week by seeing that growing churches are built on a red-hot passion to reach people far from God. Today we will see how the culture of generosity also creates amazing churches. Turn with me to 2 Corinthians 8:1-8.

The Corinthians Are Cheap

Paul, church planter and theologian, is traveling among his churches to collect relief funds for a sister church in Jerusalem. Jerusalem had been caught in the throes of a long famine and was totally dependent upon outside assistance for daily necessities. Surprisingly, Corinth, Paul’s biggest and wealthiest church, was slow to respond to this need. In fact, Paul had previously asked them to help but they flat-out ignored him (1 Corinthians 16). Paul is ticked! Brothers and sisters in Jerusalem are going hungry while the Corinthians are sitting on piles of cash! Because generosity is a heart issue, Paul tries to motivate them by the amazing example of the Macedonian churches.

Macedonian Generosity

When the Jerusalem church began to experience trouble, Paul sent his young protégé Titus to the Macedonian circuit of churches found in Berea, Philippi, and Thessalonica to collect an emergency love offering. The response of these three tiny churches was breathtaking. The Macedonian churches responded so generously that Paul told them to stop giving because they were exhausting their own financial reserves. The Macedonian response is even more remarkable given its political and economic context. Because of intense persecution, these churches were experiencing the kind of financial hardships that made themselves candidates for love offerings. As Paul says, they were enduring a “severe ordeal of affliction” and “extreme poverty.” If anyone had the right to say, “We can’t do it was these guys. If anyone was “too poor to pay attention” or so poo(r) they can’t afford the r” it was them. Amazingly, they were so eager to help they gladly sacrificed their own financial well-being for the benefit of the Jerusalem church. But how does one get “a welling up of rich generosity out of extreme poverty?” Here’s how.

An Overflow of Grace

8:1 Tells us that this generosity was as an outworking of God's grace. The Macedonians experienced God's grace through Jesus Christ and it so revolutionized their attitude about money and material possessions that generosity gushed out of them. They saw money not as something to hoard, hide, or put pride in, but as a tool for ministry. Generosity is an outflow of a life filled with the grace of God.

8:2 The result of experiencing God's grace created within the Macedonians an "overabundance of joy." And here is the opposite to what we usually hear: this joy was not because God had blessed them financially. In fact, he had not. It was in the face of "extreme poverty" they possessed "an overabundance of joy" that overflowed in generosity towards others. If we believe money is the basis of joy, it will be hard for us to be generous. As one very wealthy person put it, "Only the people who don't have money think money brings happiness."

8:4 The Macedonians pleaded for the opportunity to give more. See the twist? Normally fundraisers beg potential donors for money but here the Macedonians beg Paul to give "beyond their financial means." It's inspiring to see a people who have so little give so much. However, the Macedonians didn't do this because they were under pressure or guilt. They didn't do this because they believed that God is a cosmic slot machine and he'll give back whatever we give up to a 100x. To "give to get" was not what motivated the Macedonians. They gave because others needed it. They gave because they wanted to be a conduit of God's grace. They gave because they believed the words of Jesus, "It is more blessed to give than it is to receive" (Acts 20:35). They gave because as George Lytton put it: "Love sacrifices all things to bless the thing it loves."

Summary

Hopefully we now see where generosity comes from and how it works: In flows the grace of God. His grace overflows our souls with joy. This overflowing of joy converts into a generosity that helps others in need. In v8 Paul explained to the Corinthians that generosity is a "test of the sincerity of our love for others" (v8). In one more move to motivate the Corinthians he added, "God loves a cheerful giver" (II Corinthians 9:7). So, if we are experiencing the grace of God, if we are radiating with joy, if we love others, and if we want to put a smile on the face of God, we will practice real generosity, which as we have seen, is giving over the tithe. Now that we know what generosity is, where it comes from, and how it works, who wants to become more generous?

Conclusion

A few days later, I grabbed a cup of coffee with that dude who thought he was generous. After sharing with him many of the points we have discussed this morning I said, "I know your heart." "You're not cheap but generosity is a spiritual discipline we all need focused on to grow in Christ." He replied, "When you explained all that, it kind of made me angry but I took it to heart and talked with my wife about it. "She said, God has really blessed us so let's try and become the most generous people we can be." You know what, they eventually became top givers in the church and I have never seen a happier and more engaged couple in all the churches I've served. So, are we really generous? To find out we need check our check book and credit card statements. If we want to grow in our generosity we need to do two things. One is to live out 1Timothy 6:18 where Paul writes

**Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds,
and to be generous and willing to share.**

Secondly, remember our mission to “connect people to a life-transforming relationship with Jesus Christ.” The more generous we are the more people we can change hearts and destinies. Since amazing churches have a culture of generosity let’s have some fun right now and jumpstart more generosity here at Bay Point. In your chair is a QR Code where you can open your phone camera and it will lead you directly to our Website. There you can do either a spontaneous or repeating act of generosity to help fund our mission.

So, let’s impress God with our generosity this morning!