

DARING TO BE GENEROUS

A few years ago, there was a story out of Miami, Florida about six Royal Palm trees that had been vandalized and cut down along one of Miami's main streets. Due to the expense involved in replacing them Dade County wasn't sure how soon, if ever, they would be replaced. However, along came a generous donation of six new trees. Not only were the trees paid for but they were even planted by the donor. The former trees had been 15 feet tall and formed a beautiful foreground for a "Fly Delta" billboard. The new trees were 35 feet tall and now hid the billboard completely. The donor of the trees was Eastern Airlines. The 'generous' gift was really not that generous when the true intent of the gift was discovered.

Today I want to talk about generosity. We are continuing in our series Daring Faith and I want to speak today about Daring to be Generous.

2 Corinthians 9:6-15 Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. 7 Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. 9 As it is written: "He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." 10 Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. 11 You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. 12 This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. 13 Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. 14 And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. 15 Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

When I am speaking about generosity this morning I am not just talking about money. I am talking about being generous with your time, your energy, and your talent. Being generous with every area of your life. Learning generosity is learning to become an unselfish person.

There are a lot of promises in the bible concerning generosity. So why is God so interested in us becoming generous people? Why is He so interested in us learning how to give out of the abundance that we have been given?

The answer is because generosity is love in action. You can give without loving but you cannot love without giving. You cannot be loving without being generous. God so loved the world that he gave. God want us to mirror His love by giving as well, and generosity is simply love in action.

The word BELIEVE is used two hundred seventy-two times in the Bible. Belief is important. The word PRAY is used three hundred seventy-one times in the Bible. Prayer is also important. The word LOVE is used seven hundred fourteen times in the Bible. Loving is important, but the word GIVE is used two thousand one hundred fifty two times. Why? Because God is a giver.

In this passage we read today, Paul is speaking specifically about financial generosity so let me address that.

1. Generosity leads to Worship

Giving is an act of worship and it is a recognition that everything you have is a gift from God. Generosity draws me closer to God. Why? Because whatever I invest in is what I am focused on. If I invest my time in something, I invest my money in something, I invest my energy in something – whether it is golf or a new business, whatever I invest my time and money in shows what's important to me.

2 Corinthians 9:11b-12 ... and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. 12 This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.

Generosity leads to worship for both you and the people around you. When I invest in God and his work it not only honors God it draws me and others closer to him because wherever my money and time go is what attracts me.

Deuteronomy 14:22-23 Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year. 23 Eat the tithe of your grain, new wine and oil, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks in the presence of the LORD your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name, so that you may learn to revere the LORD your God always.

We give the first part of our income, the first ten percent, on the first day of the week. We say God you're really number one – it all came from you.

Matthew 6:21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Wherever you put your money that's where your heart's going to be. If you want to be closer to God, put some money there. It'll draw you closer to God. Giving reveals our heart, which God seeks.

Once there was a king who ruled a vast domain. He was very wealthy. There was nothing anyone could give him that he did not already possess. One day at the door of the throne room a young boy asked to enter that he might give something to the king. With amused looks, the guards moved to allow him to pass. One led the boy into the king's presence and announced with a smirk on his face, "Lord, this child has come to present you with a present." "You may proceed," the king said, extending his hand toward the boy. The boy took two steps forward, cleared his throat, and began to sing a song of his own creation. He was slightly off-key, but the words spoke praise and thanksgiving to the king for the mercy and generosity the king had shown the boy's family during the recent death of the boy's mother. When the boy was done, the king who owned everything, with tears on his face, descended from the throne, hugged the child, and said, "Thank you for that beautiful gift. You have brought great joy to my heart."

This is a picture of us in worship. The King we serve owns everything - there is nothing we can bring Him that He does not already possess. And yet, in our simple acts of thanksgiving, praise, and gratitude, we share a gift that warms His heart. That is worship. Generosity leads to worship.

2. Generosity leads to Witness

Generosity demonstrates your faith because it shows that you are trusting in the promises of God. It shows what you believe. It shows that you have faith that God will take care of you if you obey him.

2 Corinthians 9:13 Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.

Actions speak louder than words. It is not what you believe that impacts people but what you practice. Stinginess is caused by unbelief. I don't really believe that God can take care of me. I don't believe that if I give this away I'll have enough for myself. That is worry, anxiety, fear and unbelief.

Malachi 3:9-10 You are under a curse -- the whole nation of you -- because you are robbing me. 10 Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.

God says, I dare you. This by the way is the only place in the Bible you can prove there is a God. In seminary we learned the philosophical arguments for the existence of God – the cosmological argument, the teleological argument, the ontological, Kant's moral argument, and all the others. But in the Bible, it says the way you prove that God exists is by tithing and see if he doesn't bless you more. It demonstrates my faith. When we demonstrate our faith, people see it and take note.

Lucian lived between 120 and 200 AD. He was an opponent of anything religious. Yet when he saw the generosity of the Christian church he wrote: "It is incredible to see the fervor with which the people of that religion help each other in their wants. They spare nothing. Their first legislator Jesus has put it in their heads that they are brothers." Generosity leads to worship and witness.

3. Generosity leads to Wellness

2 Corinthians 9:11 You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion...

Webster's defines wellness as "the quality or state of being in good health especially as an actively sought goal." How do you acquire spiritual health? By following healthy habits. Generosity helps you to mature in your faith. Why? Because generosity makes me more like Jesus. The most generous person who ever lived was Jesus Christ. He sacrificed his own life. The Bible says we have been saved because of the generosity of Jesus. Every time you give – time, money, energy, anything – you become more like Jesus. Every time you give, your heart grows bigger. Every time you give, you become more like Christ.

Proverbs 21:26 (MSG) Sinners are always wanting what they don't have; the God-loyal are always giving what they do have.

Godly people love to give. And the godlier you become the more generous you are.

Generosity is the cure for materialism. Materialism is all about getting. Get all you can and can all you get. Materialism is about taking in and acquiring and hoarding and I've got to get more and more and more. The only antidote to materialism is giving. You may say I'm not materialistic. But if you're not generous you really are. Because the only antidote is generosity. Every time you give you break the grip of materialism in your life. You stop being materialistic.

Jesus said in Matthew 6:24 “You cannot serve both God and money.” The key word is CANNOT. Notice he didn’t say you should not serve both God and money. He said you cannot. It’s impossible. You cannot have two gods in your life. You’ve got to decide what’s more important to you – money or God. What’s more important to me? Is God number one in my life or is money number one in my life? He says you can’t have two gods. You can’t serve both.

Giving (generosity) shows what my heart is really like. In fact, the Bible says that God uses money to test what’s really inside of you. He uses money to test and see if he can trust you with more. And he says if you’re faithful with little things I’ll give you more things. And the Bible says if you’re faithful with that which is not your own – what I loan you while you’re on earth – I will give you greater blessing in eternity.

Another word for wellness is blessing. Generosity brings God’s blessing. The more you give away your time, your talent, your treasure the more God will give you. Giving brings God’s blessing.

Proverbs 22:9 A generous man will himself be blessed ...

Deuteronomy 15:10 Give generously to Him and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to.

Generosity not only leads to God’s blessing in our lives but also to being blessed by others. It says here that the generosity of the Corinthian church has not only lead to praise but also prayer from those who received the gift.

2 Corinthians 9:14 And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you.

Have you ever known that a significant number of people were praying for you? One of the joys of being in ministry is knowing that people are praying for you. I think I first sensed this when we were missionaries serving on the Doulos. When we first signed up to go on the ship, Naomi and I had to raise our support. Unlike the Alliance, where you just take money out of a pool when you are accepted, you have to raise all your support.

At first, I did not like the idea of asking people for money. The I had a friend of mine ask me if he could support us. I tried to downplay support and told him that giving was not necessary and he stopped me. He told me that giving was his pleasure, and that it was the way that he could partner with me so that all the success I had was his success as well. That really changed my attitude about giving.

We knew that, because people were giving to us, that they were also praying for us. There were days you could feel that there were people at home that were praying for you. It sustained us through our time on the ship and in Kuwait and to this day. I often have people that will say “we are praying for you pastor” and you know they mean it because you can feel it. It is such a blessing.

A few weeks ago, we had the fundraiser for Amanda. She has gone now, so I can tell you this, she was really uncomfortable asking for money. I told her that was just part of being a missionary, and that the money was not the issue. It is not the money that she really needed but the prayers and investment that came with the money.

Generosity results in wellness, it brings us a blessing. It helps us mature as believers.

It results in God's blessing on our life and also the blessing that comes through the prayers of others. Generosity leads to worship, witness and wellness.

4. Generosity leads to Earthly Wealth

2 Corinthians 9:10 Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.

You get what you give. You harvest what you plant. Generosity actually multiplies my money. God has worked out the universe in such a way that when I give God ten percent of my income He makes the remaining ninety percent go farther than if I had a hundred percent on my own.

Proverbs 11:25 A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.

God multiplies your money. You play this game. God says, "You give to me and I'll give to you - and let's see who gives more. Let's see who wins." You're never going to win the generosity game with God. Generosity multiplies my money.

Imagine exchanging gifts with a billionaire. You buy them something that you can afford and they buy you something they can afford. Who do you think is going to get the more expensive gift?

The story is told of a farmer who was known for his generous giving and whose friends could not understand how he could give so much and yet remain so prosperous. One day someone asked "You give far more than any of the rest of us and yet you always seem to have more to give." "Oh that is easy to explain," the farmer said. "I keep shovelling into God's bin and God keeps shovelling back into mine and God has the bigger shovel." –Herbert Lockyer

A woman walked up to the counter of the general store and laid down her groceries. "Is that everything?" asked the man behind the counter who owned the store. "Yes," said the woman "I think that's it." The man began ringing up her purchases when he noticed the woman's son peering up from behind her.

"Why don't you get yourself a handful of suckers?" he said, pointing to the big jar that was just in front of the register. The little boy's face retreated behind his mother. "Oh, go on," the man said, "get yourself a handful of suckers." The boy stayed hidden. The man laughed. "Well, here," he said, putting his hand down into the jar, pulling out a handful of suckers. At this the boy came out from behind his mother and extended both his hands out to receive the pile of suckers.

After the groceries were paid for and loaded up, the woman turned to her son and said "Why were you so shy in there? Why didn't you reach your hand in and get the suckers when he offered?" Her son pulled the sucker he was eating out of his mouth and looked up at his mother. "Because his hands are much bigger than mine." Generosity leads to worship, witness, wellness and wealth.

5. Generosity leads to Eternal Wealth

Money is to be used. It is not to be loved, it is to be used. If you use money, you love people. If you start loving money, you're going to use people. Money is a tool, it is neither good nor bad it is neutral. You can use it for good or you can use it for bad. There's nothing evil about money. It can be used in really good ways; it can be used in really bad ways.

People say, Doesn't the Bible say that money is the root of all evil? It doesn't say that. It says the *love* of money is the root of all evil. You're to love people and use money. Not reversed. So he says use your money to do good.

You can't take it with you. You never see a hearse pulling a U-haul. You can't take it with you but you can send it on ahead. How do you do that? Four times in Scripture Jesus says store up treasure in heaven. How do you do that? How do you invest in heaven? By investing in people who are going there. That's how you do it. Getting people into heaven. Getting them saved and growing. He said that's investing in heaven. He said what you send on ahead you're going to be able to enjoy the treasures in heaven for yourself.

Luke 16:9 I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

Jesus tells the story in Luke 16 of a manager who is about to lose his job. He then quickly reduces the debt for a number of people so that, when he is broke, they will help him. I remember when I first read this, I did not understand it. Does that mean that God wants us to use my worldly resources to buy a bunch of friends? That is really not what he's saying. The key is the word "eternal dwellings."

What God is saying is this: Take some of your money and use it to build bridges of friendship to bring people to Jesus Christ who are then going to be saved and who are going to go to heaven with you. And when you get to heaven then there will be people in heaven who greet you and say, "You're here! Thank God for all you did. You gave some money that brought me to Jesus Christ. I'm in heaven because of you. I'm your friend forever."

Is anybody going to be in heaven because of the way you use your money? Are you going to have any friends up there because people say, "Thank you. I'm here because of you. You bought a Bible, you sponsored a project; you built a church; you helped the program; you did other things... and through that I came to know the Lord. I'm here because of you. I'm your friend forever."

Everything I spend on myself on earth, I'm losing. Everything I invest in others and in God's work I'm going to gain again in heaven. Where do I want to keep my greatest wealth? Here where I get to use it for a few years or in heaven where I get to use it for trillions of years in eternity? It's a no brainer. Generosity will be rewarded in heaven.

Some people say "I will be generous when I become wealthy." No, you will not. It starts now, with the choice to share what you have.

A pastor had a farmer friend in his congregation and they were talking over the fence one day. The pastor asked the farmer, "Abe, if you had one hundred horses, would you give me fifty?" Abe said, "of course I would." The pastor asked, "If you had one hundred cows, would you give me fifty?" Abe said, "Yes." Then the pastor asked, "If you had two pigs, would you give me one?" Abe said, "Now cut that out, pastor; you know I have two pigs!"

Are you a generous person?