

Generosity 1: The Basics
2 Corinthians 8:6-8
10/2/16

- A family was leaving church after weekend worship and the mom & dad began to complain about the service: music bad, sermon dry, room too cold, sound too loud. Then, from the back seat, their child said, “Well, I thought it was a pretty good show for \$1.”
 - It goes to show that our children are watching what we do – everything that we do. It always makes an impression. And, often, they know the definition of real giving better than we do.

- Last week, we heard a great message from Pastor Tesilus from Haiti for our Faith Promise Sunday on generosity in spite of being in need and he spoke on giving yourself away for the work of the Kingdom of God.
 - This generous act of giving yourself away happens in many ways – in your time, your efforts, and your resources. Last week, we closed our service with that song, “I Give Myself Away.”
 - In reality, we can’t sing that song if we don’t have a generous heart. Only generosity will prompt someone to give themselves away, especially if they are giving away their money.
 - So, as we lead up to thanksgiving, we are going to be talking about generous giving. Today, we are going to look at the basics of generosity. Then, we are going to examine various level of generosity as God works in our hearts and leads us.

- One of the basics about generosity and money is that the Bible speaks more about money than just about any other topic. The Bible has 500 verses on faith, 500 verses on prayer and 2,300 verses on money and possessions. There are more verses in the Bible about money than about heaven and hell.
 - I’m just betting that God knows something here about our human heart, our human nature and our human condition that he deliberately put in that many verses about money and possessions.

- I believe he knew that money would be more important to us than just about anything and we would even do what should be the unthinkable for money. James Patterson and Peter Kim wrote a book entitled “The Day America Told the Truth.” This book was the first mass survey on mass morality ever conducted and was touted as an unprecedented portrait of the American people by the American people. One of the survey questions asked to thousands upon thousands of people was, “What would you be willing to do for \$10 million?”
 - 25% - Abandon entire family

- 23% - Become prostitute for a week or more
 - 16% - Give up American citizenship
 - 16% - Leave spouse – I'm actually surprised with this number. I would think this would be a lot higher. After all, people get divorced and leave for a lot less than \$10 million.
 - 10% - Withhold testimony to let a murderer go free
 - 7% - Kill a stranger
 - 3% - Put children up for adoption – what??? Actually, I thought this might be higher. For me, some days might go as high as 90% depending on what those boys are putting me through!
- What does this tell us? The Spirit of Selfishness is alive and well in America. I call it a spirit because selfishness is not of God. It is of the enemy. This spirit from the devil holds us in bondage – even those of us who have found freedom in Christ.
- I am currently in my 20th year of full-time professional ministry. Time sure flies. And, I've heard a lot from folk during that time. Lots of confessions of sin, lots of pouring out some deep secrets in their lives. I am humbled that people trust me with that kind of confession and information and I honor that by keeping confidentiality.
 - But, in looking over what folk have told me over the years, I have never, never had someone come to me to confess their selfishness or unscriptural use of money. I really think that it is more likely for someone to come to me to confess that they committed a murder than to have someone come with their finances and say, "I'm not using my money in the right way. I want to use the money that God has given me according to what Scripture says. Here is all of my financial stuff. Can you give me advice on it?"
 - Why is that? Because we keep our money close to our heart – closer than just about anything else. And, anything that close will eventually hold us in bondage.
 - Think about it – how often do you think about money and getting more of it? How often do you think about what you want, what you like, what you think you need? How often do you worry about money and your financial situation? And, how often have you talked yourself out of giving to the church or to someone else, but you have never talked yourself out of getting for yourself?
 - We could write another book with those answers and the book could be entitled "When the church told the truth."
- The truth – that is exactly the solution to our problem, our obsession, our desire, our greed for more money and more possessions. TRUTH – It will "set you free." The real truth about money can be found in the 2,300 verses of the Bible! The truth will only set you free if you cling to the truth because there is someone who wants to keep you from the truth.

- Christian author John Bevere writes, “The most important doctrines of Scripture the Devil wants to pervert.” So, since God knew our human heart and addressed the issue in his Word of money and possessions so much in order to guide us and direct us about something that could so easily trip us up and hold us in bondage, Satan works overtime to try to twist and pervert what God has said in his Word.
 - That’s why you have to cling to God’s truth rather than trying to find your own truth that is some fusion of what God says and what you makes sense to you and what the world says. When we do that kind of fusion, we come up with something that may seem comfortable to us, but it isn’t of God.
- An example of how some Christians have tried to fuse God’s truth with human understanding is when some people think that generosity with money is optional. So, they say that generosity can be seen in other things and they cite their good deeds in other areas.
- But the Bible speaks to this idea. Last week, Pastor Tesilus read from 2 Corinthians 8:1-5. Today, we are going to continue reading in 2 Corinthians 8. Interestingly, Paul spends two whole chapters, 8 & 9 talking to the Corinthians about giving and generosity. Again, it must be something pretty important.
 - Let’s read **2 Corinthians 8:6-8**
- So, prayer, good deeds, volunteering, acts of service and kindness, faithfulness, being able to preach and teach, having great Bible knowledge even loving people – they are all good things and things of God. Yet, they do not take the place of generosity.
- Paul was telling the Corinthians. “Do all of that and ADD generosity with your resources. Generosity will complete all of those things.”
 - Then he goes on to say that he isn’t commanding it because, let’s face it, you can’t command generosity. I cannot tell you to be generous. It doesn’t matter who I am. The highest authority in the land cannot command generosity. The Apostle Paul, the one who started the church in Corinth couldn’t command generosity. Why? Because generosity is a condition of the heart, not of the mind or willpower.
 - What generosity does, though, is it shows how generous our love is for what and who we say we love. Our generosity or lack of generosity shows the condition of our heart and whose bondage or control we are under.
 - As we have said here often, “You can give and not love but it is impossible to love and not give.” That is what Paul was getting at with the Corinthians when he said he was testing to see how genuine their love was for Christ and the church.

- So, if we know that generosity completes what we do for God and acts as a test as to our love for God, his church and his people, let's get to some basics of generosity. The first basic is that all CHRISTians are growing in generosity.
 - o Now, you might look at that and you know that isn't a true statement. Not everyone who calls themselves a Christian is growing generosity. You know plenty of "Christians" who are not generous. I do to.
 - o But, I'm not talking about people to call themselves Christians, I'm talking about people who are really Christians. Capital CHRIST.

- See, we have lived in a time for so long where the term Christian has become so watered down. Anyone is a Christian. All they have to do is say so. To this day, most people in America would say they are Christians.
 - o So, sometimes we forget that the word "Christian" literally means Christ-like and originally was given to those who were Christ-like and who wanted to be like Jesus.
 - o So, let's just make that distinction. Not everyone who says they are a Christian are really a Christian because they aren't striving to be, growing to be, or desire to be like Christ.

- But, for those who are Christian in name and deed, then we are growing in generosity because generosity is the heartbeat of God and the motivation for Jesus coming to earth.
 - o Christ was so generous that He gave up perfection in heaven to come to earth. He was so generous that He gave every drop of blood to pay for our sins. He was so generous that He gave himself away – completely. He came with nothing, he took nothing, but he gave everything.
 - o We are children of a generous God. Think about the beauty of creation He gave us. In the next few weeks, some people go out to see the beautiful foliage of New England. That is God's generosity poured out for us!
 - o He thought of everything to bring beauty into our lives and to show his generous love for us.

- Since we were created in His image, we are designed to be incredibly generous. There is something in us that will edge us toward generosity because the fingerprints of God are on our lives. Unfortunately, there is another influence in us, called the selfish human nature that talks us out of acting like the image of God we were created to be!
 - o Yet, if we are growing in Christ. If we are striving to be like Christ. If the desire of our heart is more of you and less of me so that day by day we are becoming more like Christ, then we will be generous and will grow in generosity.

- The Bible makes this so plain. Here are a few of the 2,300 verses about the godly being generous:

- *Psalm 37:2 says "The wicked borrow and never repay, but the godly are generous givers."*
 - *And Proverbs 21:26 tells us "Some people are always greedy for more, but the godly love to give!"*
- The closer I get to God, the more generous I will become. The closer you get to God, the more generous you will become. If you aren't growing in generosity, you aren't growing in Christ! Then, you've got to examine your heart and allow Jesus to take some control!
- Because, listen closely...and this is in your outline. If you don't typically fill out the outline on the back of your bulletin, I would ask that you at least fill in this point. It's just that important. In fact, it's important enough I'm going to say it at least twice!
 - **"Everything you have is God's and only what you give away will have eternal significance."**
 - The house, the car, the vacations, the newest and best technology, the stuff purchases for hobbies, the things that fill our houses – no eternal significance!! None! None! None! And, yet those are the things we focus so much of our time, effort and thoughts upon. They have no eternal significance.
 - The only things that have eternal significance are what you give away. Are you giving away your faith as you share the truth of Jesus with others? Are you giving to meet the needs of others so that they are even willing to hear about Jesus? Are you giving to the work of God through the local church and other endeavors where God's hand and kingdom building are evident?
- If you are becoming more like Jesus, it will not only be evident in how much you come to church, in how much you read your Bible, in how much time you spend in prayer, in how much you participate in outreach and service in the church or even in how much you are growing in the fruit of the Spirit of love, joy, peace, patience kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Becoming more like Jesus will also be evident in your giving and in the generosity of your giving. Because becoming more like Jesus changes your heart, your core.
- The story is told that one day a beggar by the roadside asked for alms from Alexander the Great as he passed by. The man was poor and wretched and had no claim upon the ruler, no right even to lift a solicitous hand.
 - Yet, the Emperor threw him several gold coins. A courtier was astonished at his generosity and commented, "Sir, copper coins would adequately meet a beggar's need. Why give him gold?"
 - Alexander responded in royal fashion, "Copper coins would suit the beggar's need, but gold coins suit Alexander's giving."
- God could have given to us in a way that didn't cost him so much, that didn't cost the life of his Son. We certainly didn't deserve a life so perfect. But, giving is not so

much about the “need” that you are giving to, but it’s about the “nature” of the “giver.”

- He gave his all because that is who he is – he is love and love gives all. Because I am a spiritual descendent of Jesus Christ, I am a generous giver. His giving nature should be alive and well in me.
- Then, selfishness just doesn’t agree with my DNA! It doesn’t sit right with me. It bothers me. I can’t just live selfishly because the Spirit of the most generous God living in me won’t let me! As a CHRISTian, I am growing in generosity.

- The second basic of generosity is that blessing is a by-product of generosity.
 - *Proverbs 11:24-25 (NIV) describes this when it says, “One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.”*
 - Let’s watch a video that illustrates this.

- That video illustrated Proverbs 11:24-25 which basically said that when you give, it will always come back to you. Your gift leaves your hand but not your life! God will find a way to give it back to you. That is how he works!
 - That is how he even created nature to work. Did you know that it is not possible to create an empty hole? Nature won’t allow it. If there’s nothing in there, air will fill it. It is the same principle in us in regards to giving something away.
 - When you give something away, you create a hole...and it must be filled. And, when you create a hold giving for God, then God is going to fill it up.
 - Generosity creates a vacuum into which God flows. This enables us to go on giving again and again.

- Over and over again, the Bible tells us that you cannot “out-give” God.
 - *Luke 16:9 (NIV) “I tell you, use your worldly resources to benefit others and make friends. In this way, your generosity stores up a reward for you in heaven.”*
 - It’s how Jesus could tell his followers in *Luke 12:33* to *Sell your possessions and give to those in need. This will store up treasure for you in heaven! And the purses of heaven never get old or develop holes. Your treasure will be safe; no thief can steal it and no moth can destroy it.”* Jesus knew the economy of God and that if they trusted him enough to do that, God would show up and give them more!
 - Then again in *Luke 6:38* *“Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full—pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back.”*

- Do you see that when you give, you are blessed further to be able to give more?
 - Let's look at one more in *2 Corinthians 9:10 – 11* *"For God is the one who provides seed for the farmer and then bread to eat. In the same way, he will provide and increase your resources and then produce a great harvest of generosity in you. Yes, you will be enriched in every way so that you can always be generous."*
 - We truly cannot ever out give God. He wants to keep giving to us so that we can keep giving to him and to others. The problem is that our trust is what gives out. When we don't trust the words of God, then we will fail to live by those words.
 - God's word says in *Proverbs 28:27* *"Whoever gives to the poor will lack nothing."* Are God's Words what you trust? If you have trusted God's Word, you have seen his blessings come over and over and over, in such generosity that it still amazes you. If you don't trust his Word completely and you're still trying to trust your own understanding and the world's view on money and financial wisdom, then you find yourself wondering why you aren't being blessed.
 - Blessing is a by-product of generosity.

- The third basic of generosity we are going to look at this morning is that selfishness stifles happiness. Oh, we think we are happier when we hold on to what is ours, but it just doesn't ever work that way. How many of you know people who have a lot of money and stuff, but they just aren't happy?
 - Again God's Word tells us this. *Proverbs 14:30-* says, *"A peaceful heart leads to a healthy body; jealousy is like cancer in the bones. Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker, but helping the poor honors him."*

- Selfishness is so unlike God, it will stifle everything good in your life.
 - If you are selfish in marriage, always making sure that your needs are being cared for while neglecting or belittling the needs of your spouse – it won't be a happy marriage.
 - If you are selfish with your talent, your talent loses its appeal and you might even lose your talent altogether.
 - If you are selfish with your heart – you'll end up lonely.
 - And if you are selfish in finances – you will eventually find no joy in the things you do have. It becomes a continual pattern of wanting more, getting it and it not being enough. That seems like misery.

- But, that's not what most people live. That's the wisdom of our world. The wisdom of the world says, "take care of yourself." So, why is happiness so far off? Why doesn't taking care of yourself work? Because selfishness is incongruent with the nature of God.
 - Therefore, selfishness, in any form, separates us from God.

- For forty years, Eunice Pike worked with the Mazatec Indians in southwestern Mexico. During that time she discovered some interesting things about these beautiful people.
 - For instance, the people seldom wish someone well. You know, when you are leaving someone or ending a conversation and you say, "Have a good day." They would never do that.
 - Not only that, they are hesitant to teach one another or to share the gospel with each other. If asked, "Who taught you to bake bread?" the village baker answers, "I just know," meaning he has acquired the knowledge without anyone's help.
 - Eunice says this odd behavior stems from the tribe's concept of "limited good." They believe there is only so much good, so much knowledge, so much love to go around. To teach another means you might drain yourself of knowledge. To love a second child means you have to love the first child less. To wish someone well--"Have a good day"--means you have just given away some of your own happiness, which cannot be reacquired.
 - So, they selfishly cling to what they have and don't want to give any of it away.

- Sadly, some people live their lives like this because they believe in limited good and limited things and limited money and limited happiness. They don't know that there is a God who is LIMITLESS!!!
 - His love is limitless, his care is limitless, his resources are limitless, his knowledge is limitless and his generosity is limitless.
 - And this limitless God wants to develop in us a heart of limitless generosity as well for God loves a cheerful GIVER. Giving is the only solution for selfishness and the only way to find true joy for it joins our hearts with the heart of a giving God.

- G.K. Chesterton once wrote, "There are two ways to get enough: One is to accumulate more and more. The other is to desire less."
 - Desiring less could be a good solution. But, when it comes to the kingdom of God, I'm not sure he wants us to desire less.
 - What I am sure of is that He wants us to desire the things of God more than the things of self.

- So, those who call themselves Christian...are you growing in generosity? Do you want any selfishness in you to separate you in any way from God?
 - Do you desire more of the things of God or more of the things of self? If we want the heart of God, then we want a generous heart that desires more of the things of God and less of the things of self.
 - If you are struggling with any of those – and we all do! Be certain that I am not perfect in generosity and dying to selfishness. No one here is. But, if you are struggling because self is more in control and you know it, today

might be a good time to meet with God right up here and lay yourself at the altar so that you can get up with a greater desire and heart for the things of God.