

A Generous Community: Postures and Practices

Part 1

9-18-16

Text: Luke 12

Reflection Questions...

“What is enough? How will you know? Who decides?”

“How has what you have failed to receive often prevented you from giving? Are there any deficits in your life that could benefit from your willingness to give irrationally? How might you make a greater contribution to your circumstance/relationship than what you have received?”

“To what relationship have you stopped giving? How committed are you to the long-term investment? Are you willing to invest in it even if it doesn’t produce short-term dividends?”

Teaching Notes...

A couple of things I need to address.

First, a recently reported trend amongst millennials: 40% have given up on breakfast cereal because it’s too inconvenient because they have to clean up after they eat. For a guy who grew up on “Honeycombs” and “SugarPops”, this is understandably disturbing.

Second, my almost visceral response to **“Come Back to Church” Day**. I’m concerned that we still live under the illusion that our culture is anxious to come to our church; that if we can execute a streamlined theological production (right worship music, best media offerings, good cappuccino) our attractional approach will pay human dividends.

The people that God longs to love through you--- the ones to whom he desires to bring his restorative love--- are likely not sitting in this building today! They are, instead, seated in the cubicle area around you. They are standing next to you in the café line at Microsoft. They are seated in the lawn chair next to you at the soccer tournament. You have to take church to them.

The most contented and fulfilled people I have ever met all have one thing in common: they are all “generous”. They realize that we live best when we live for others.

First of all, let me say that I think the greatest disservice we have done to generosity is to make it solely about money.

Money is not the only currency (medium of exchange) for generosity [time, energies, abilities/capacities]. In fact, I think it’s actually easier to be generous with our money than with our schedule and relational currency (e.g. cut a check, for the purpose of not having to get involved personally: it means that you are impoverished/stingy in your emotional and relational resources).

Generous people tend to see the world differently. They see creation as *“belonging to God, and everything in it”* (Psalm 24) and envision a world where God is *“scattering his gifts”* to all in need (Psalm 112).

They see people differently. They are the blessed whom Jesus said function out of a deep place of identity and security in God and who are able to give without having their name engraved on a brick; they are able to pray without concern for who hears them. They don't see the world as a place of limited resource, but as a place filled with God's abundance. Their world is enlarged. Their God is bigger!

They are not only generous, but what I would call **generative**. They always encourage and call something out in us. They always make a contribution into our lives and you feel more full, more alive when you are with them. They have the power to reproduce that kind of response in another [we all know what it's like to be in relationship with folks who 'drain' us; who exhaust us and our resources]. Generous people are full, but always dispensing goodness. They are gratefully giving, but never depleted. They are self-aware, but always turning themselves toward the other.

It is then, and only then, that the words of Jesus make sense; begin to resonate with you. *“If you want to find your life,”*

Any talk of generosity cannot begin with how we “give”, but with how we “receive”.

The reality is, I am always more comfortable with giving. Why? When I give, I feel responsible. In order to receive, I must renounce self-sufficiency (I'm not the source) and reject the notion of entitlement.

“Freely you have received, freely give...” Matthew 10:8

“What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?” 1 Corinthians 4:7

We're all charity cases. Everything we possess is, in a sense, a 'hand-me-down' (James 1:17)

The misconception of generosity: once I have accumulated enough, I will be satisfied and, therefore, I will be inclined to give.

There is no hint in this parable that the farmer has done anything wrong. He hasn't manipulated the market, he hasn't mistreated his workers. The climate and the conditions have joined together in producing an abundant crop and he now has more than he needs.

His “inner-monologue” reveals his heart condition; his treasure: *“I will build bigger barns...”*

“Isn't that the point... bigger buildings, bigger bank accounts, bigger profit margins, bigger salaries,... how could Jesus seriously find fault with that?” Our entire economic system is built on such a premise.

Notice that the man's surplus did not automatically cause him to think in terms of generosity. Instead, it caused a great deal of insecurity and anxiety.

Bigger barns mean bigger maintenance expenses and more energy directed toward care of the barn itself: meetings with accountants, stressing about budget-overruns, etc.

Jesus' short answer to his economic-strategy... **"you fool"**. Not because he had money or that he was planning for the future, but that none of those plans concerned God, he lived with an unawareness of how such consumerism was eroding his soul and he failed to recognize how God might desire to use what was entrusted to him for the good of another.

The unfortunate reality is that when your soul is not satisfied, "more" seems to be the reasonable resolution. (e.g. Coldstone Creamery: **"Like it...Love it... Gotta Have It"**) Empty bowl, dirty spoon, lots of regret.

Unfortunately, we are all born with the "grasping instinct"; to reach for things which we believe will satisfy us. But, couple the "grasping instinct" with the "unrestrained-desire instinct" of a discontented heart and the results are disastrous.

Generosity is not determined by what you have received, but what you are willing to give.

God does his best work in the context of human availability.

It would have been so easy for Jesus to say, "Okay, why don't you guys go over there and sit and I'll put in an order to Father for take-out for 5,000".

It seems that whenever God desires to do something extraordinary through his followers, it is always beyond their capacity, but not without their availability. *"What's that in your hand?"* (Moses) *"How much lunch does the kid have?"*

"Give and it will be given to you, a good measure, pressed down... running over" Luke 6:38

Giving engenders generosity and generosity promotes giving. What if we can actually give that which we have not ourselves received? (e.g. some of you have not received favor and affirmation, but you can give it; some of you have not received forgiveness, but you can offer it to another).

Scarcity is always rooted in fear. Generosity is always cultivated in gratitude.

Generosity is always fostered by love and love always wishes it could give/do more. It is willing to give "all" no matter how much "all" involves.

Our posture...

Realize that if it can rot, rust or depreciate, it was not meant to satisfy you.

Say grace. Live grace-fully.

Gratitude is a disposition. It means "gratefully holding". It says nothing about the amount/volume of what you are holding.

Learn to “give your way out” of the challenging situation currently facing you.

Our first instinct in the face of potential deficit or lack is to “stop giving”, which is to effectively obstruct the flow of life which is so dependent upon receiving and giving (e.g. if you are having some relational issue that you would like to see reconciled/reversed, begin to give to that relationship (time, attention, resources)).

There is some space, some relationship, some need in your life which is longing for the wholeness that only generosity can provide.

We desire to be a generous and generative community that is learning to break the cycle of self-indulgence and pre-occupation for sacrificial expressions of love and care. We want to see ourselves, not simply as consumers, but as contributors.