

A Generous Community: Postures and Practices

Part 2

9-25-16

Text: 2 Corinthians 8:1-5; 7-9; 12-15

Reflection Questions...

“If it is true that money talks, what is your money saying about you? How would you like to alter that pronouncement?”

“What if that became the personal mission statement of every sincere Christ-follower: that we would give ourselves to refreshing others? To serving others? To contributing and investing in people and relationships in ways that always allowed us to give more than we receive?”

“What is it that I currently have that I feel that I am to continue to enjoy? What am I supposed to give to another in order that they might enjoy it? Am I able to find enjoyment in the exchange?”

Let me frontload our time today with these observations:

► **Life always organizes itself around our hearts** [ref. 900x; source; “headwaters”] Heart: that mysterious, powerful “center” in us all that has always suspected that there is “more”; that life is bigger than the frantic striving for status and titles and Twitter followers.

In the Story, there is always a direct link between our hearts, the choices that we make, and the kind of life that we experience.

► **Treasures always get the “best” of us** (e.g. time, energy, resources, attention); **meaning, you will serve (attend to) what you treasure.**

► **It is impossible to walk “north” and “south” at the same time. You cannot have (2) points of reference for your life** (“*You can’t serve two masters...*” Matthew 6:24) **The (2) will inevitably come into conflict and one will retain the ultimate authority over your life** (authority means, “*meaningful grounds for action*”).

The one that ‘rules’ (governs) will inevitably be, not the one that you profess to trust, but the one that you portray that you are trusting through your decisions and demeanor; the one that you believe will allow you to experience the life that you desire.

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free” Galatians 5:1

Everything that Jesus does is about “**freedom**”. It is not about independence or living free of any boundaries, but about living beyond the limits of anything that’s impeding our experience of the full life that he desires for us.

Jesus knew that the misdirected pursuit of wealth posed a serious threat to our heart-allegiance. He said repeatedly that we could either utilize it in a way that allowed us to exchange and distribute goods for the benefit of humanity, or it would become deceptive and oppressive.

Jesus didn't save you from your sins in order for you to be controlled by your money because, if you are in debt, what you owe actually has control over your future because it is telling you what you can and can't do in the present. You are no longer free.

"...we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches." (8:1)

I have discovered that the truly 'supernatural' display in this type of counter-intuitive generosity is not the funds which inexplicably materialize (check that just shows up in the mail), but the ones which have a name and a mailing address attached to them.

Paul uses the churches in Macedonia (southeastern Europe) as a way of painting a picture of generosity. The church in Jerusalem is not only experiencing famine due to crop failure, but an interruption in their ability to generate income due to persecution [boycotting businesses, demonstrations, etc.]

Since there was no **"Go Fund Me"** opportunity, Paul has gone to both the Galatians and the Corinthians to secure charitable contributions.

Paul grounds his entire appeal in terms of grace. There's no hint of obligation; no emotional manipulation, but simply the invitation to join in on what God is longing to do, not without them, but in cooperation with them.

By identifying it as a 'grace', he explicitly demonstrates that it is a response which can be directly traced to God. It is not simply a philanthropic expression, but a result of God's renewal and restoration of the human heart.

Finish this 'life-equation': extreme adversity + extreme poverty = _____ (did anyone come up with joy and generosity?)

Realistically, these are (2) concepts/conditions that one would never expect to juxtaposed; used to describe the same situation.

"... they are very poor, but they are also filled with abundant joy which has overflowed in rich generosity. ...they gave not only what they could afford, but far more. And they did it of their own free will. Their first action was to give themselves to the Lord and to us, just as the God wanted them to" (8:2-5).

Generosity is the freedom to give without the compulsion to give.

Generosity has nothing to do with intellect, education, socio-economic status or talent, but what you believe to be true about what you have and what you choose to do with it.

I love being generous, as long as I'm not being I have to (e.g. you have the impulse to give, but before you can do it or verbalize it, someone says that you should do it, and the impulse smolders?)

Here is the nexus: we don't start with our posture of generosity--- what we are willing to give--- but with the grace of God, which we must be willing to receive.

Generosity is a confounding demonstration of unprovoked goodness.

Generosity never begins with giving more, but with being more grateful.

If you want to be more generous, don't attempt to start with simply giving more. If you lack gratitude, you not only diminish the capacity for God to bless you (because you don't ask; heart is small), you impede the flow of his goodness to others.

If you attempt to simply increase your donor capacity, apart from gratitude, you will tend toward resentment for having to give, instead of thankfulness for the opportunity to share in what God is doing through you for another.

Grace is not the ability to keep the law (meet the minimum daily requirements), but to live beyond it.

"Since you excel in so many ways--- in your faith, your gifted speakers, your knowledge, your enthusiasm--- I want you to excel in the grace of giving" (8:7)

Generous people never ask how much they have to give (*"Do I still have to tithe? Gross or net?"*) These questions all miss the point; they all address the issue of what's 'expected' of me.

The Law said, *"Give 10%."* Grace says, *"Feel free to give with irrational generosity; from a heart that's been expanded and enlarged by the generosity of God toward you."*

Generosity is not about being 'careless', but about being 'care-free'.

That doesn't make them frivolous or reckless or irresponsible, but simply removes some of the constraints we normally place on our giving.

Generosity says: "No matter how much I have, I know there is more. No matter how much I give, I know I will have enough. Regardless of how I have experienced God, I know that there is a depth of his love and goodness which I have yet to tap."

Cultivating habits (practices) of 'grace-giving':

Give willingly and decidedly.

Grace is never meant to be an accommodation for our over-extended lives.

"Whatever you give is acceptable if you give it eagerly..." (8:12)

"...you must decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure" (9:7)

Give proportionately and extravagantly.

"Give in proportion to what you have" (8:11).

You're only required to give that which you possess, which prevents your generosity from being limited by your financial status.

Try giving disproportionately. Sometime our void/lack is the best time to practice generosity. There have been times in my life when, out of some emotional or relational deficit ("I've got nothing to give"), I have decided to give anyway. I believe I was stepping into the grace of giving, meaning, favor coming to me from a source beyond, but not outside of me... the Holy Spirit. I was empty, I was filled. I was devoid, I was abundant.

Give sacrificially.

Giving sacrificially helps to ensure that our stewardship is never reduced to cheap professions which require nothing of us. It interrupts our lifestyle and causes us to re-orient our concerns in light of the other.

[pearl of great price, Matthew 13 *“In his excitement, he sold all he owned...”*] Did you notice that there was not mention of reservation; no bemoaning what would be lost--- only the joy over what would be gained?

Give faith-fully.

“Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all of your crops...” Proverbs 3:9-10

“First-fruits”: first of the crop was harvested and given not only as a means of gratitude, but in anticipation of a future harvest. This type of giving seemed ‘illogical’, but it was ultimately a demonstration of trust. It was actually meant to take the fear out of giving (took from you ‘control’); God was responsible.

The goal of generosity?

“... two good things will result in the ministry of giving: the needs of the believers will be met and they will joyfully express their thanks to God. As a result of your generosity, they will give glory to God” (9:12-13).

Jesus is not calling us to vows of poverty, but a pursuit of gratitude and generosity. In fact, to do so, in many cases, would simply be an abdication of our responsibility to steward well all that God has placed into our trust.

The absence of wealth will never resolve the issue of a disorderly heart... a heart that is directed to pursue the wrong things.

Proverbs 11:25 *“The generous person will be prosperous and he who refreshes others will, himself, be refreshed.”*

If you have been entrusted with something which might refresh another (e.g. an idea, encouragement, experience, time, financial support, etc.), it doesn’t belong to you, it belongs to them. You are simply blessed to the distributor of such goodness.