

A World Built On Generosity

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[0 : 0 0] Quick question for you, but I suggest you pause for a few moments while you think about it. I want you to think of an experience in your own life when you were on the receiving end of generosity.

Think about that for a few moments. And as you do so, remember who it was and what it was that they gave you or did for you. But not only that, try to recall how it made you feel as you came to realise and appreciate just what it was that had just happened.

How did your thinking unravel as the truth of that person's generosity became apparent to you? What did it feel like?

Generosity tends to trip us up. It stops us in our tracks. It catches us unawares. We've internalised that old saying that there's no such thing in life as a free lunch.

We get so used to assuming that others must have some kind of hidden motive and that offers of extravagant kindness must come with some sort of catch.

[1 : 0 8] Perhaps there's a sense in which it's no bad thing to carry a healthy sense of suspicion. But is there a danger that we almost make that into a virtue?

See, when we are confronted by genuine, unconditional generosity which has as its motive love and nothing other than love, then it takes us a while to process that, to unpack it.

But when we have come to terms with the reality of an act of genuine, selfless kindness, when the truth of it lands, it has the power to do something to us inside.

We find ourselves reconnected spiritually with others, with God. That's because God is love. Now, I don't say that casually as a piece of sentimentalism.

I say it as a theological statement. It's right there in 1 John chapter 4, which tells us that love comes from God because God is love. That is, God's not just the source of love, but actually is love in his very being.

[2 : 1 2] It's the greatest power and is the only thing that can overcome anything and everything else. It's at the very heart and soul of life itself. It's intrinsic to ultimate reality.

So that's why, when we're on the receiving end of generosity, and the reality of that generosity hits home, we're confronted with the fundamental goodness of God himself.

Thing is, our everyday lives and our broken human nature has this awful tendency to pull us away from this truth. Way back in 1973, some social scientists carried out what eventually became quite a famous experiment.

Some theological students were asked to prepare a talk on the Good Samaritan. When they arrived at their class, they were told they needed to go to another building on campus to deliver their talks.

Some were told that their audience was already waiting for them, so they had no time to lose. On their way to deliver their talks, the students came across an actor who was slumped on the footpath, moaning and pretending to be in distress.

[3 : 23] You can probably see where this is going. Only 53% of the students hurrying to give talks on a famous parable about generosity stopped to help the man.

And get this, the variable that had the most effect on whether they stopped or not was how much time pressure they thought they were under to get to the building to deliver their talks.

It's easy to approve of generosity. It's much more difficult to be generous. And that old experiment exposes a really important truth.

It's so often simply the rush and pressure of everyday life that stops us being generous. We don't disagree with generosity.

It's not that we disapprove of it. In fact, it's the very opposite. We love it and we want to be generous. It's just that it's hard. And one reason why it's so hard is that life throws demands and pressures at us that we become distracted from the very things we actually know in our hearts are most important.

[4 : 32] And let's not think that life has only become pressurised in recent years. That experiment was carried out in 1973. And of course, Jesus told that famous parable rather earlier than that.

His teaching is timeless because God's understanding of the human heart is timeless. So what might we do about it? How can we, in the midst of all the pressures of ordinary life, retune ourselves to the generous heart of God that actually gives us life itself?

Well, we're given a bit of a clue in the life of David, a snapshot of which we see in today's reading from 1 Chronicles 29 verses 10 to 14.

Now, as a king, David would have led a busy life. He would have faced pressure, stress, big decisions, difficult challenges every day of his life. And yet he made sure he remembered God in it.

He prayed. He gave thanks. He looked to God as his provider, as his source, as his rock and as his fortress. He made time to do that.

[5 : 39] We know that because he wrote the Psalms. And here in 1 Chronicles, as David draws to the end of his life, he's busy getting things ready to build the temple that he knows he won't live to see.

He's busy, busy making plans, busy doing important stuff. But by this stage of his life, he's been around long enough to know that the busier you get, the more important it is to keep your focus on God.

And that's precisely what he does. He gives thanks. In 1 Chronicles, we get to see David doing this. We see him praying. And his prayer is a pretty good one for us to make our own.

He says this, Lord, everything comes from you. And we have given you only what comes from your own hand. Let's make that our prayer every day.

And as we go from here now, let's make it our prayer right now. So let's pray together. Lord, as we go into this coming week, may we keep our focus on you each day.

[6 : 47] Help us to remember that everything we have comes from you and is only ours because you have entrusted it to us. And so help us to be generous with our lives and to remember that everything we offer you is what comes from your own hand.

Thank you in Jesus name. Amen. And we'll see you very soon. Go in peace. Have a great week.

God bless you.