

Proverbs: Skillful Living - Generosity

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[0 : 00] Well, it's good to be here this morning, church. Amen. Good to begin our week seeking the Lord, giving him the first fruits of our week in worship. We're continuing in a study in Proverbs. This morning, if you haven't figured out, we're going to be talking about generosity.

So, let me pray, ask God's blessing on our study, and then we'll dive in. So, would you join me? For this says, the one who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy. I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him, who is of contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.

Oh, God, what a mystery to us that our God, who dwells in eternity, might be near to us. And so, we give you thanks this morning. We begin our week by seeking your face, desiring to hear from you, desiring to worship. Lord, thank you that you are mindful of us, that Lord, although you are the one who dwells in unapproachable light, you're the Alpha and the Omega. You're sovereign overall, and yet you dwell with your people. And for that, we say thank you. Lord, would you speak to us this morning from your word? Thank you that you have penned a book that we can know your heart on all matters of life. Would you empower me with your spirit? And Lord, might we leave here having done business with you?

We love you, Jesus, in His name we pray, and all guys, people said, Amen. We serve a generous God, amen. For God so loved the world that He gave. He gave us life. He created us in His image that we might have friendship with Him. He gave Himself. He shares His stuff with us every day. It's so interesting to me that we can easily obsess on Genesis 2.17 where God puts limitations on Adam in the garden, and He says, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat. All the while, just the verse before, God tells Adam, you may surely or freely eat of every tree in the garden. Our God is a generous God.

He's gifted us with a planet that has capacity to sustain life, provide for our daily needs. We have air to breathe. We have sounds to hear. We have beauty to observe, colors and light and flavors. We can touch and feel, hear and appreciate, and all of this none of us asked for. And yet, it's in God's nature to be a giver. Above all, God has shown His generosity in the giving of Himself, the giving of His Son, His very Son to die on our behalf, for the forgiveness of sins He didn't commit, but sins we committed, that He might continue to give to us for all eternity. Our God is a generous God. And our response ought to be thanks be to God for His inexpressible gift, and yet, it is man's tendency to not.

[4 : 29] We live in a world that teaches something very different. In fact, we live in a world that demands personal rights as the ultimate expression of what it means to be human. We live amongst demanding people who are all about how I am, how I am, how I am, how I am. We live amongst demanding people who are all about how I feel, what do I receive, how do I appear, life is about me. It sort of reminds me of the the chat from Greek philosophy, narcissus, where we get our English word, narcissism. This chap who was a hunter, so enamored with his appearance that he spent his entire lifetime staring at himself in the pool of water. A life absorbed with self. But for God's people, this ought not to be. And why?

Because God is a giver, and those who bear His image ought to reflect Him. Amen? So He's called us to be a generous people. Let me suggest first this morning that the lack of generosity in a believer's life, it reveals more than anything that man isn't necessarily struggling with a generosity problem, but he's struggling with a worship problem. And maybe you're thinking, Jay, but when I gather, man, I'm singing louder than anyone. Well, as much as God delights in hearing us sing when gathered, adoring Him when gathered, worship is not limited to adoration one day a week. I love this image from Isaiah. We have the scene of the Lord in His throne room in Isaiah 6-2. It says above Him stood the seraphim, each had six wings. With two He covered His face, and two He covered His feet, and with two He flew. And so you have these angelic creatures closest to the throne of God, those that were engineered to worship seraphim, or rather translated burning ones. And we have something in the image of these creatures designed for worship, and it says that they have six wings. And it says they have two they cover their face, and two they cover their feet in humility and adoration, and yet there's two left over. Two to fly. Two to work. Two to give. Two to serve. And so we have a great picture of worship encompassing both these pieces, that it is about adoration to the Lord kissing the ring, bowing in humility, which we talked about last week. But it's also about generosity, about working, about serving, laboring. So to lack in generosity reveals a scarcity of worship in our souls. And maybe you're going, well, gee, why are you making such a big deal about generosity? Like is there going to be a special offering today that we're not aware of? No, there's not. But as I have already stated, generosity is worship. And it's a big deal to God. Do you realize that there are over 2300 references in Scripture that talk about giving one's resources to another 2300 that is more than twice the amount of verses on any other subject. Just let that sort of hit you. Our God is a generous God. Any desires for us to be a generous people. So yes, there is much material on the subject. Today, we're going to limit ourselves simply to the

Proverbs. And what I'd like to do first here is just to begin and build us a definition of generosity. So we'll begin here in Proverbs 14:31. It says here whoever oppresses the poor man insults his maker. But he who is generous to the needy honors him, honors the Lord. So we have here in this first proverb, we're looking at an individual who has means, has resources, it's implied in this proverb. And this individual who has resources is withholding from another that is without. And here defined as the poor man. And God takes offense. Why?

Because both these individuals are created in the image of God. And so by doing so, this individual with resources is insulting God rather than honoring him bad worship. And this word generous here, Hanan.

Sometimes this word in the Hebrew is translated to be gracious or to be merciful. It literally refers to an individual bending towards another in kindness or stooping in kindness. That's the word Hanan generosity.

[10:40] Bending one's kindness towards the needs of another to freely share one's resources with another. And it is the natural outpouring of kindness. Or said even better, it's actually the necessary outpouring. Because you can give of your time, your talent, your treasure and not actually love. You can see this in a man pursuing a woman, doing all these nice things and given time and gifts and all the while the motivation is very selfish, very carnal in nature.

So you can give and not love, but you cannot love and not give. The love of others and generosity are inextricably linked. Just imagine for a moment the Good Samaritan seeing this individual on the road, moves to the other side, passes by and says, Hey, love you, bro. Love you. Love you. Just keeps walking. We would not call him the Good Samaritan, would we?

Those two things are linked together to love will translate into action. Well, we're given a couple of warnings related to generosity or rather not living with generosity, living life with a very close fist.

Let me give us a couple warnings here from Proverbs. It says the first one from Proverbs 21 13. It says, Whoever closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself call out and not be answered.

Super practical. Whoever closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself call out and not be answered. And the sense of this parable is that if we're stingy people, when we find ourselves in need, who's going to be there to help?

[12 : 52] Those that disregard people in life gain a reputation for being about themselves, loving themselves, loving their things. And when it happens to be their hour of need, which is crickets.

It's a warning the Lord gives us. Let me ask a question. What is the worst request that a friend can make of another friend?

What is the worst request? They need something and they're going to ask a friend, the worst request I'm going to tell you, it's when they say, Hey, will you help me move?

Right? That is that is the worst request a friend can make of another. I got a phone call about a year ago from some friends that moved here to Spokane asked if I could help. I didn't have to think about it. I was like, Yes, I'll be there. And I was multiple times.

And that's unusual because I'm not into moving. But I was there because this couple, 20 years prior, they had given up a week of their lives to help Julie, myself move into our very first home and make it actually habitable.

[14 : 24] And we didn't ask them. They just showed up. They took a week off. We were so blessed. So when they came around said, Hey, could you help us? I didn't have to think about it. And I think there's an application here of this proverb.

But there's a warning if we live in a very, very self focused rhythm, it's going to be hard for us to have others wanting to come alongside and lend a hand.

Second warning here, Proverbs 28, 8 says this, whoever multiplies his wealth by interest and profit gathers it for him who is generous to the poor.

Whoever multiplies his wealth by interest and profit. Now, there's an Old Testament prohibition against charging interest to those in need.

You can read it. It's an Exodus and Leviticus, Deuteronomy. Exodus 22, 25 is a passage you can look at later. And here this individual, we'll call him the fool, is exploiting others in their hour of need.

[15 : 33] Oh, I'm going to charge you interest in your hour of need. It's like that guy at the hardware store who's got a bunch of generators in the back of his pickup and it's a snowstorm. And he went into the store first and bottom all and now he's like double the price and he's exploiting, right?

Those that are in their hour of need. And this is what's happening here. And there's a warning here for an individual that lives by this sort of heart posture. That it's not that just man won't be there to help you, it's actually God.

In fact, in God's providence, it says your wealth, your resources will be entrusted to another who will utilize them well.

It's a warning. And maybe you're thinking, well, Jay, you don't understand. For my personal wellness, I need lots of stuff.

You don't understand. Well, I appreciate what prior of 18 says on the matter. Verse 10 and 11, the name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous man runs into it and is safe.

[16 : 43] A rich man's wealth is a strong city like a high wall in his imagination. Isn't that good? It's not real.

It's not real. What is saying? For those that think that wealth is somehow guaranteed that, man, life is going to be grand and smooth and you're protected.

It's like a high tower, high wall in your imagination. It's not real. Our wealth, it's simply a resource God has entrusted to our care, but in terms of security, it's a placebo.

It's like those little yellow masks that fall in the airplane when you're nose diving at 700 miles an hour to the earth. And you're just like, oh, oh, I just put one of those on.

And you're like, I'm good. You good? Look, we got our masks on. It's like wealth.

[17 : 52] It's a placebo. Well, those are warnings, but on the flip side, what's so cool is that God says, you know what, there's actually blessing in being a generous person.

In fact, Proverbs 19 17 says it this way, whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord and he will repay him for his deed.

So what you have here is this principle. There's a biblical principle of reciprocity, right? That how we live, it will come back and the Lord says, if you refresh another, you will be refreshed.

And this isn't like some quid pro quo with God, like if I do this, God, you're obligated to do that for me. We don't give in order to get we give to minister to serve to worship, but in that there is a blessing.

And I love that Jesus says, hey, it is more blessed to give than to receive, which is so fascinating to me that that's not recorded in any of the Gospels. It's not until Acts 20 where we actually see that in this oral tradition.

[19 : 03] It's like, hey, Jesus said this all the time. It's more blessed to give blessed, happy joy. There's a blessing in it.

And it may be monetary, it may not be. But if the Lord says there's a blessing, I want it. And so should you. Well, what does generosity actually look like?

I'm going to give us three generosity principles this morning from Proverbs. And the first one is this generous people give when they can generous people give when they can.

Let's look at Proverbs 21, 25 and 26. It says this, the desire of the slugger kills him. The desire of the slugger kills him for his hands refuse to labor. All day long, he craves and craves doesn't labor, but he craves.

But the righteous gives and does not hold back. We've got this contrast parable here between the slugger and the righteous or the generous.

[20 : 19] The slugger wants stuff yet doesn't want to work for it. And in the end he starves. The righteous are willing to work hard and then they steward.

Well, what they have earned so much so they have enough to share with others. They don't hold back. It's in their power to give. They give. I would say there's no better example of this in Proverbs than the godly woman of Proverbs 31.

It says here in Proverbs 31 19 and 20, says she puts her hands to the distaff and her hands hold the spindle. She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy.

What a great example. Here is a woman who is laboring and her labor is not just devoted. Her work is not just devoted to her own self interest.

Oh, I'm making more stuff so that I can have better stuff or better vacations or whatever it happens to be. She has a heart to work hard in order to be generous in order to share with others in need.

[21 : 34] God puts needy people into our path church that we might minister to them. Amen.

I cultivated a friendship with this gal that lived on the streets in Seattle. She lived in an abandoned building that was looking like it should have been condemned and kind of a long story.

But I would often drive, do my shifts at Uber and then I knew where she lived in the city or where she would often be. And so I would go and I would drop off food or I'd drop off flashlights or blankets or and it was such a blessing.

I was so humbled to be able to be to have ministry with this gal. And I knew that I gave her my jacket one time because she didn't have a jacket at the time and it was a nice jacket.

But I was like, you know what? I can go to Costco. I don't need my \$200 puffy jacket. I can get a puffy jacket at Costco for 35 bucks. And I know she probably ruined it in the course of maybe a week because of the squalor that she lived in.

[22 : 50] But it was such a blessing to be able to serve this individual. And I believe that God puts people in our paths and then he will prick us. Right? God's spirit will prick us to go, man, I want you to do something.

And we need to be sensitive to God's spirit when we have those experiences. Maybe you're going, well, Jay, if the principle is, man, if you can give to give, like, are we supposed to take like a vow of poverty here?

Like, do we just give to anybody that asks? Generosity and thoughtfulness or wisdom, they really need to go hand in hand.

Okay. And I really appreciate it. Scott, last week, he brought up the passage in Proverbs 6. If you recall, Proverbs 6, 1-5, about this young man who cosigns on a loan to an untrustworthy friend and recall what, how the proverb ended.

Proverbs 6, 5-6, it says this, save yourself like a gazelle from the hand of the hunter, like a bird from the hand of the fowler. Like, get out of that agreement.

[23 : 55] Get out of that binding situation. And I love that we're given that as a qualifier, as a reminder to exercise wisdom in our generosity. Those two things need to go together.

And I'm not sharing that so that we're like, oh, well, now we have an excuse not to give. Rather, we have freedom to be wise in our giving. Amen? Well, second principle, we need to be open to God.

Well, second principle, generous people give when they can. Second principle is generous people help when able.

Proverbs 11, 26 says it this way. The people curse him who holds back grain, but a blessing is on the head of him who sells it.

So again, we have a person here who is looking to profit off the misery of another. And so you have here this grain speculator who is hoarding his crops in order to then drive up the price instead of selling at a fair value.

[25 : 09] To those in need. And so the question we have to ask ourselves is this sort of business practice, bending in kindness towards the need of another?

Not at all. I love that we're given this example as well as another reminder. Like this individual is not being chastised because they're selling a product because they're making a living.

That's a good thing. Great. Hey, if you want to start a business, awesome. Get some employees, let them support their families. That's a great thing. He's being chastised not for selling, but rather for selling.

That's a great thing. He's being chastised not for selling, but rather for exploiting those in need.

Man, if you can help when able, do so. Probably one of the most humbling experiences I've had, although I think I've had quite a few, but as of recent.

[26 : 26] I was really at the bottom. I couldn't even go to the mailbox. I couldn't mow the lawn. I could do nothing. And it was really a difficult season in so many ways, but we were blessed by some men in our church that knew we had a need.

Our fence was just dilapidated. I couldn't even mow the lawn, let alone repair another panel in our fence that the wind. We were in a wind tunnel, our house. So it was like every time, you know, the fence would go down.

And these men, about a dozen of them came over with their own funds, their own labor, their own time. They built this fence. And I'm telling you what, it was horrible. It was horrible and glorious at the same time.

They had capacity to help, and they did. And it was just, it was such a lesson for us, such a blessing for us as I reflect back on that. And I love that we have folks that have all sorts of different talents and skills.

And when we think about generosity, this is not to be reduced to what's in your checkbook, what's in your pocket. Like it's in your wallet. No, it's all of life.

[27 : 35] It's all of life. In fact, I would say even more precious than money.

It's probably your time. So generous when you see folks in a church and they're serving in the kitchen. We had a men's breakfast yesterday and there were guys up.

They were cooking at 6am to bless those that are shown up. I mean, working, giving up a right of being here and serving our children, or giving up an evening in the week to serve our youth.

And it's like, this is generosity. It's giving of yourself, it's giving of your time. You know, Proverbs actually has a lot to say related to the generosity of words.

Look at Proverbs 25:11. It says this, a word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.

[28 : 40] We're not talking fruit here. We're talking architecture. We're talking jewelry. We're talking a master craftsman making something beautiful in the image of an apple.

It's gold in the setting of silver. But what it's saying about our words when we're generous with our words, generous with our encouragement, a word of encouragement at the right moment. It's like placing a beautiful necklace on a friend.

Or even a word of correction in the right moment. It's like sliding a gold ring on their finger. A word fitly spoken.

Let's steward the resource of our words well, church, and be generous. Proverbs 32:7, it obviously encompasses far more than words.

But let me just focus it on words here for the time being. It says, do not withhold good from those to whom it is due when it is in your power to do it.

[29 : 47] So generosity may be being willing to speak encouragement to another when you don't have to.

I have to sort of check myself all the time when I'm driving Uber because there's times when I don't want to talk. Because I can tell the person, I think I can tell that person doesn't want to have a conversation and so I'll just not go there.

And sometimes I have to like, no Jay, you need to initiate. You need to, and I do, and sometimes I'm surprised. And we have a wonderful conversation. This person that was putting off vibes of I'm not going to interact with you and then all of a sudden it's like, oh, sometimes we have to do that.

We don't have to speak, but we get to, there's opportunity. And I've even had to think about this in terms of, you know, if you're around people that don't encourage, you can easily become like them.

And not encourage, but yet God wants us to be generous with our words. And so don't let somebody else's rhythm determine how you're going to be with this resource the Lord has entrusted to you.

[30 : 58] I got a chance to interact with a friend last week who was having just an incredibly rough day. And I just sat down with him and I shared some words, and I didn't even think these words were that profound.

But then later, a few days later, I get a card and they said, your words, they were everything on this most difficult day. It was like the Lord used that.

The Lord did something with that. You know, generosity, it's not just the word. Sometimes generosity is not using words.

See, now I'm going to meddle. Sometimes it's the resource of your ears. Maybe that's an odd thought for some of you, but yeah, that's generosity giving your time to actually listen.

Some of you are stingy in this. I mean, I don't have anybody in particular I'm thinking of.

[32 : 10] Are you generous when listening to another? Proverbs 18, 13 says this, if one gives an answer before he hears, it's his folly and shame.

Do you need to grow in generosity in terms of listening to others? And then how do you use your words afterwards?

To bless, to encourage, or simply to self-promote? And if the latter is true, it will destroy the ministry you could have in the life of everyone.

And I share this and it's a painful thing for me because I know somebody, and this was true of them. They had so much to offer. They had so much to give, but their send button was so massive and their listen button was so small that it destroyed ministry in their life.

I love that this church, and I think Scott sets a pace here, is just that we need to be listeners. We really need to grow in that. And there's huge profound ministry when we're generous in that regard.

[33 : 21] Again, it's a worship issue. Am I going to stare at myself in the pool my whole life, or am I going to realize it's really not about me?

It's about a generous God who allows me to reflect him in whatever resource that is to share. Words, encouragement, listening, finances, labor.

Here's one. I love that we have people that are generous in their prayers. To take time to intercede for another, that's generosity.

See, generosity is all of life. Well, our third principle is this generous people see themselves as stewards of God's stuff.

Generous people see themselves as stewards of God's stuff. Yeah, God shares His stuff with us every day, all day long.

[34 : 32] But you know what? It's all His. It's all His. Isaiah 66-1. Heaven is my throne. The earth is my footstool.

Psalms 24. The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. Everything is His.

So at the very heart of us growing in generosity, it's recognizing that generosity, it's not actually freely sharing one's resources with another. Rather, it's sharing God's resources with another.

Amen? It's all His. We're stewards of God's stuff, all that we are and all that we possess.

Proverbs 13-22. I know we're going through a lot of Proverbs. There's a lot on generosity, as you can see. A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children, but the sinner's wealth is laid up for the righteous.

[35 : 45] Again, you're not using it well? I'm going to give it to another. But I love this Proverbs. A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children.

And the essence of this Proverbs is this, life is not about trying to consume all our assets on ourselves. You ever heard that?

Oh, I'm going to spend their inheritance. Like, we should use and give to others, whether it's family, beyond, and I think it is beyond because it's our children's children.

We should be able to be a blessing to even those that we will never meet. You know, there's no better example of one who saw themselves as a steward of God's resources than Cory Ten Boom.

We will read The Hiding Place in DTS at some point because it's such a good book and she is such a worthy individual to be challenged by. But Cory Ten Boom, her family, they ran a watch repair shop in Holland.

[37 : 03] In 1922, Cory actually became the very first woman licensed as a watchmaker in Holland. Pretty cool. Her family set a high mark in terms of using their resources well, of being generous with the Lord, and trusted to them.

Their shop, their home, it was always open to guests. And if you've read that story, it's like a revolving door. People are welcome all the time.

This is God's, we're going to use it for the Lord. So much so that in May of 1940, the Nazis invaded the Netherlands and then at age 48, Cory and her family continued this lifestyle of generosity.

In fact, they constructed a secret room in their home, The Hiding Place, to be able to hide Jews about six individuals could hide in this space. Cory writes, at any minute there might be a rap on the door.

She thought to herself while visiting with Jewish friends, these children, this mother and father might be ordered in the back of a truck. And so at the peril of their own lives, this family helped over 800 Jews be able to flee the Netherlands.

[38 : 24] Generosity. Courage. Eventually they were turned in by an informant. The Gestapo ultimately arrested, there's many in their family, about 30 individuals.

Most of them then were released except for Casper the father, Betsy and Cory. And we know the story that Cory survives miraculously, the concentration camp she was in.

Betsy does not. And Casper their father, this is what I want us to sort of end with and think on, his response, one of the guards at the prison said to him, and he's 84 years old at this point.

The guard says to him, I'd like to send you home, old fella. I'll take your word that you won't cause any more trouble.

His response, if I go home today, I will open my door again to any man in need who knocks.

[39 : 40] Ten days later, he died in prison, but I love his resolve. My God's a generous God. I will not not open my door to somebody else who is in need.

Church, we're a generous people because our God has been generous to us. In fact, the Gospel is a generosity story. Second Corinthians 8-9 says it this way, he was rich yet for your sake he became poor so that by his poverty you might become rich.

Church, that is the best of God. He gave us the very best. He gave us himself. And that's an extravagance never to be repaid.

And it's horrible and it's glorious at the same time. And if that's who our God is, how could we not represent him well by being a generous people?

Amen? Father, we thank you for time gathered together. We're so thankful that you are God and we are not.

[40 : 49] That you came not to be served but to serve and to give your life as a ransom for many, for us.

And we delight to be called your people. Thank you that you've placed us here in Spokane. Thank you that you've called us to be a church family here at 4th Memorial. Lord, we want to be, we want to show your heart to those that we do life around.

May generosity be the posture of our hearts. For your glory, for our joy, and for the joy of those that don't know you yet.

It's in your name we pray. Amen.