

Generosity that Produces Praise

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Preacher: Mark Chew

[0 : 0 0] Now, I'm sure many of you are familiar with this, but let me ask the question anyway. And the question is this, have you ever faced the challenge of getting a child to share their toys?

All right, a few sneakers there. There are many ways to do that, isn't there? Here's one, not a very good one. You could just take it from them and give it to the other child, right?

But as you know, that's not very effective because you have created one happy child at the expense of another. And then you'll hear the tantrums going for a while.

Slightly better could be that you could insist that the child shares. Talk to it, talk to him, her, sorry, not it. And persuade very firmly that they need to share.

Okay, maybe there are two toys and you say you have to give up one for the other. Now, that's a better solution, but I think that's still suboptimal, right?

[1 : 0 5] Because even though each child now has at least one toy to play with, they're not going to be getting along. Instead, you'll have each child in their own corner, jealously guarding their toy, just in case it gets taken from them.

By far, the best outcome is to actually gently persuade the child with the toys, not only to share, but to play together.

And of course, with some other things like board games, which older children play as well, like you, computer games, PS5 maybe.

It's no fun to do it alone. You want to play together. And what you discover is that at the end of the day, the toy or the game itself isn't really the source of joy, but rather the interaction and the relationships that result.

The toy or the game is merely the means, but the goal really is the friendship or the relationship that the game has enabled.

[2 : 1 7] And this is true, too, with generosity, or rather with the things we're generous with. They end up being the means for love and joy to be expressed, for our true humanity to be displayed to its fullest.

Now, last week, we began our study in 2 Corinthians 8 on the topic of generosity. And I did say that I would elaborate on the explanation that Paul had at the end of the last chapter about why he was sending Titus and the other two brothers to Corinth.

Well, as we look into chapter 9, the first few verses tell us why. You see, Titus and these two brothers were being sent as an advance party.

As we learned in verse 3 and 4, if you look there, it's to help the Corinthians to prepare so that when Paul arrives, he would not find them unprepared.

Paul had made much of the Corinthians' desire to give. So much so that he says in verse 2 that their enthusiasm has stirred most of the Macedonians themselves to action.

[3 : 3 2] So Paul doesn't want his boasting in them to be in vain, to bring shame for him and for them, should any of the Macedonians accompanying Paul find the Corinthians unprepared.

And so what we find in verse 5 is that Paul finishes this point with the following words. So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to visit you in advance and finish the arrangements for the generous give you had promised.

Then it will be ready as a generous give, not as one grudgingly given. Now these brothers, including Titus, had been carefully chosen by Paul as trustworthy people whom the Corinthians could trust.

They were also ones who had confidence in the Corinthians. You see, Paul had to rely on them to actually be tactful to help the Corinthians so that they would not be grudging in their giving, but rather be generous and warm.

What Paul envisages is that when he then turns up, the Corinthians would be ready and waiting to hand over this gift with a big smile and a warm welcome.

[4 : 45] Now in order to drive home his appeal for generosity, remember Titus is actually probably going to take this letter that he's writing to them. Paul now gives them a few more principles to help them come to this same point.

And these are all found from verses 6 onwards, which you see on your outline. And that's where we're going to spend the rest of our time today, because I would like for us at the end to really see what a blessing it is to be a generous church and to be generous Christians within that church.

So what's the first principle? As it says on the outline and on the slide, it's that generosity rewards the giver. Verse 6, Remember this, Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.

Now Paul, of course, is appealing to our self-interest here, but that doesn't make the principle any less true. Paul isn't saying we're only to be generous just to benefit ourselves, but the truth is that when we are, we ourselves are blessed.

We reap what we sow. And again, that doesn't mean our reward is exactly what we sow. He's not saying that if we're generous with our money, then we're going to get more money back. Rather, he's saying that if we are generous and a blessing to others, then we will reap the reward of being blessed ourselves.

[6 : 17] As Paul says himself in the book of Acts, it's more blessed to give than to receive. But there's a sense of proportionality here.

That is, the more generously we sow, the more we'll reap. And of course, as I again repeat myself, what we reap is more than just money, but rather a rich variety of God's blessing.

So what Paul is saying is, don't hold back. The mindset we should have is not to minimize or limit our generosity, but actually to maximize it.

It's asking, what more can we do, rather than feeling, oh, have I done enough already? As we saw last week, the image I gave you was that of open-handed generosity, a generosity that overflows.

And so, hand in hand with this is the second principle, which we find in verse 7, that generosity requires a cheerful giver. So verse 7 says, each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

[7 : 30] And again, as I said last week, this generosity has to come from us. It can't be forced out of us. So, you know, from time to time as a church, when we come to passages like this, you know, it's my responsibility to, as a pastor, to teach on the topic of giving.

I remind you from God's word what a blessing it is to give. But then, I think it would defeat the purpose if I then kept harping on it all the time.

If I kept nagging you to be generous, it takes the joy away, doesn't it? And so, that's why we're only doing two weeks, and then that's it. All right?

No more from me next week. And that's actually one of the beauties of doing, you know, preaching through books of the Bible, isn't it? You can't accuse me of deliberately talking about giving, because we've just come to this passage.

I'm not doing it because I think you need to be more generous, but I'm only teaching it, because some of us will need to hear it. But then, it's time for me to stop, because if I keep harping on it, and forcing you to keep thinking about it, then you no longer give willingly, will you?

[8 : 47] You're giving out of compulsion, almost as an obligation, because you want to shut me up. Paul, therefore, has to be balanced as well when he writes to the Corinthians.

So, yes, they needed to be taught this principle of cheerful giving, but he has to just hold back, isn't it? Because he cannot compel them. But notice that Paul also reminds them that when they're generous, and this is the thing that I think ought to motivate us, it is God that they bring joy to.

That is, they're not doing it to please Paul, the pastor, or other people, even though, you know, we are pleased when we see God's people being generous. Rather, they bring joy to God himself.

For God loves a cheerful giver. And I wonder how that makes you feel, to know that when you're being generous, it actually brings a smile to God's face.

That he takes joy in seeing us give cheerfully. Does that motivate you or inspire you to give, to be generous? I pray that that will.

[9 : 56] And God loves a cheerful giver. Why? Because that reflects who he is. Just as parents love it when they see themselves in their children, only the good points, of course.

God loves it, doesn't it, when he sees his character reflected in us. He sees the impact of his own generosity to us overflowing in us then being generous to others.

And God so loves a cheerful giver that actually he enables this generosity. And that's our third principle, that God himself provides us with the means to do so.

Our generosity relies on, or is dependent upon, in God's gracious provision. So verse 8, God is able to bless you abundantly so that in all things, at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

Do you see the aim of God's blessing us abundantly here? As I said last week again, it's not for us to then hoard it, is it? But really it is to enable us to abound in every good work.

[11 : 08] Just notice all the superlatives there. In all things, at all times, all that you need, so that you might abound in every good work.

God will supply us everything that we need to be generous. Last week we saw that Paul says that they have to give according to their means.

But when we have a God that then enables us and increases our means, that also means that it allows us to be increasingly more and more generous in our lives, isn't it?

And often we do think that, you know, we look at our limited resources and we may think, oh, look, what difference would my giving make? And, you know, in particular as well, if I give, then will I really have enough for my own self if I'm generous?

Well, here Paul is reminding us, don't forget who's the one who's providing you with all that you need, not just for yourself, but actually to be generous as well.

[12 : 12] Paul is saying that even as we give, there's more where that came from. And now he draws a quote from the Old Testament to encourage us not to be afraid of not having enough.

That is, when we give generously, God will look after us. Verse 9, as it is written, they have freely scattered their gifts to the poor. Their righteousness endures forever.

Now, as you know, Ned read from this passage in Psalm 112. And if you look at the wider context of that Psalm, you'll see why Paul quotes it. And I've got it on the screen. Verse 6, Surely the righteous will never be shaken.

They will be forever remembered. They have no fear of bad news. Their hearts are steadfast, trusting in the Lord. Their hearts are secure. They will have no fear. In the end, they will look in triumph on their foes.

They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor. Their righteousness endures forever. Their horn will be lifted high in honor. The point of the Psalm is that those who are righteous, those who fear the Lord, need not be afraid of not having enough or not doing well in life.

[13 : 24] What they need to do is simply to trust the Lord in all things. They can give freely, knowing that the Lord will establish them. That is, continue to cause them to stand firm and to have enough.

So be generous, Paul says, because you can rely on God to provide. And as I said, not just for yourselves, but also to enable you to be generous to others because that leads to an abundant fruitfulness.

Hence, verse 10, Now he that is God, now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food, that is, the one who provides for all your physical needs, will also supply and increase your store of seed, that is, more than you need, and including other things that material need, in order that it will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.

That is, you have enough to give to others to do good so that the harvest of your righteousness will increase. You see, whether it's the money you need to be generous or the wisdom to know how to use it or the compassion for people so that you give cheerfully, God will enrich us, as he says, Paul keeps saying, in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

And that brings us to the very last principle because generosity that's done by faith results in overflowing praise to God. So to finish the rest of the chapter, Paul says, this service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.

[15 : 14] Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ and for your generosity in sharing with them and everyone else and everyone else and in their prayers for you, their hearts will go out to you because of the surpassing grace God has given you.

Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift. So many superlatives in just that short passage, isn't it? Now those of you who are physicists can probably describe this better than I can and I hope that I get this right but as I understand it, in a nuclear reactor, what happens is that there is a chain reaction of nuclear fission.

Correct? And what's happening is that the initial act of splitting an atom to create energy actually causes more and more splitting of fission of atoms.

Alright? I think that's how it works. And depending on the conditions, the number of fissions grows exponentially so that you have an ever-increasing amount of energy that's produced.

Right? I think if you don't control it, that's when you get a nuclear meltdown. But if you have the rods, that sort of keeps it in equilibrium, I think. Now why am I telling you all this?

[16 : 41] It's because I think if you look at this passage, a similar sort of chain reaction is going on here. Paul describes this initial service to the Lord's people not simply as a single action and reaction, is it?

That simply supplies a need in Jerusalem and then that's it. But rather, that this act sets off a chain reaction that culminates in an overflowing expression of thanks to God.

And if you think about it, God could have, you know, as I said last week, God did not need to, you know, do it in such a roundabout way, does He? If there was a famine in Jerusalem, He could have just stopped the famine and the people, the Lord's people in Jerusalem would have, you know, had enough of being able to then get the food that they need.

But no, what happened is that Paul and Titus, what happens is that rather than there's a famine, Paul and Titus then bring this news to the Corinthians and Macedonians to ask for their generosity and then Paul and Titus then bring, you know, go around collecting it and then bringing this collection back to Jerusalem in order for them to then have what they need and then seeing the generosity of the Macedonians and the Corinthians offer prayers for them which are likely to be forms of praise and thanksgiving to God.

And all this because they recognize the faith and obedience of the Corinthians. It's all rather messy, isn't it?

[18 : 25] But the whole purpose of it, I think, is so that at the end of the day, God gets the praise, isn't it? This grace that God has poured out initially on the Corinthians has come back full circle, back to Him in the form of praise to Him.

But what it requires is that firstly the generous, the cheerful generosity of the giver, followed by the praise and thanksgiving of the recipients and the witness of others to that generosity.

God has, in one sense, by that single action, created a whole series of other chain reactions that results in praise to Him. Almost, as I call it, an ever-crescendo of praise to Him.

Perhaps even a cacophony of praise, but a good and beautiful one. And often, you know, I think it's right that we are quick, aren't we, when someone is generous to us or has been kind to us, we're quick to be thankful to them.

And that's the right thing to do. But here, Paul reminds us that actually, we should also praise God, shouldn't we? So yes, thank the person who is generous, share with others how they have been a blessing, but then remember to do that one more thing, which is to turn upwards to God and praise Him for the grace that He has shown this person to enable them to be generous.

[19 : 49] Why? Because it's God who initiated all of this blessing in the first place. It was His initial act of grace that has enabled that generosity and therefore He's the one that ought to be praised and thanked.

And I think in this sort of economy of God's blessing, that's the genius of God, isn't it? So that it's not just God just blessing one person, but through the needs of one blessing another, there is lots of mutual generosity that allows all of us to be praising God.

Now, it is that sort of time of the year when many mission agencies and Christian organizations send us stuff in the mail to appeal for funds, isn't it?

So this week I got something from Ridley College, a letter, their 2022 renewal appeal. And of course, last week we talked about CMS, their lasting hope appeal.

And I have to confess that, you know, often my mindset is, you know, I'll pick up the letter, look at the photo, nice students, very appealing, and then say to myself, you know what, I'm already giving to missions, so maybe not this time, you know.

[21 : 18] I'll pray for others to give, though, no, that's a good thing, and then sort of put it in the recycling bin. But I don't know whether that's the right attitude, is it?

Because actually, if there is a need to be supplied, then it could be that God has created it and drawn my attention to it, so that there is now an opportunity for me to respond with the obedience that accompanies, Paul says, my confession to the gospel, isn't it?

And so, perhaps I ought to respond, because I can, so that I can multiply the praise to God. Perhaps I should do it, because it would bring a smile to God's face if I do it cheerfully.

And perhaps I'm wrong to ask, haven't I done enough? But instead, I should be asking, what more can I do? Now, I know we need to be discerning.

Not every letter that comes in your mail is worthy of support, so we ought to, you know, look at what the goals of the organization is and whether they're faithful to the gospel. people, but putting that aside, if that's a need that's worth supporting and we can do it, then we ought to think seriously about doing it, shouldn't we?

[22 : 38] Not just because our brothers and sisters need it, not because Ridley College needs it, because they do, and not because God has blessed us so that we can bless others, but ultimately, we want to do it because it pleases God.

And we do it because when we are generous and other people see it, it will prompt them to praise God, isn't it? And we are doing our bit then to create this ever-increasing cacophony of praise that's wafting up to God and bringing pleasure to Him.

That's, I think, the beauty of being part of a church that's generous, isn't it? That when we are generous to each other, we're creating all this rightful praise that's going up to God because He's worthy of it.

So, let me encourage you then to take these two weeks that we've talked about generosity to heart, have a think about how you can play your part in creating a generous church, and then to do it, not because I'm saying so, but because God is prompting you to do so willingly and cheerfully from your own heart.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for the indescribable gift of grace that you have shown us in the Lord Jesus. Thank you that we are blessed with your own measure, not just materially, but for eternity.

[24 : 02] Thank you for your promise to supply all we need for every good work. Give us willing and cheerful hearts to know that what you have given us is to be used to supply the needs of others so that praise can redound throughout the world and across the ages.

Use our meager offerings of generosity to magnify your name with the name of your Son Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.