

Showing Generosity.

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Preacher: Andy Lloyd

[0 : 00] Good morning all, nice to see you. We're continuing our series on learning the unforced rhythms of grace from taking some concepts from John Mark Comer's book. I'm sure that many of you have seen that, if not it's worth having a look at. And we're thinking today about generosity, which is kind of me, isn't it? Most people didn't see what I did there, Mike.

That's the problem. Turn with me, if you would, to 2 Corinthians chapter 9. And beginning at verse 6, Paul writes, remember this, whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. 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. And 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. As it is written, they have freely scattered their gifts to the poor. Their righteousness endures forever. Now he who supplied seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed, and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way, so that you can be generous on every occasion. And through us, your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. 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. Because of the service by which you have proved yourself, 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 with everyone else.

And in their prayers for you, their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace of God has given. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift.

Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift. The word indescribable there is, I haven't written the Greek down, but the word that they use there is only used once in this chapter, in this context, in the whole of the New Testament. It's a word that tries to get the idea that you can't say it. You can't get the magnitude of God's gift. It's unutterable, indescribable. It's just one of those words where you can see the writer, you can see Paul, but you can see those who are translating it, thinking what word is big enough to describe or capture or grasp what God has done for us. And when we start thinking about generosity, when we thought, and later on I will be talking about money, I'm sorry, I know that's something that we British don't do, but we will be.

But we need to start with this idea that God has given us, an astonishing, indescribable, unutterable amount of blessing.

[3 : 58] And we've just, in the meal we've just taken, the bread and the wine and the remembrance of the death and resurrection of Jesus, that's unutterable. It's indescribable. It's quite astonishing.

And we do remember, and we do remind ourselves, and it's good to remind ourselves, how very, very, very extraordinary is the love of our God for each of us. And how Jesus went to the cross. And there's lots of stuff about he went willingly, and of course he did go willingly. But he didn't go thinking, this is going to be a bundle of fun. He told his father, can you take this away? And he went because he loves you. He went because it's the only way that we can reconcile to the father. He went because he knew it had to happen.

So I just wanted to, and it's important to start, as we look at this idea of generosity, with the indescribable gift of God. God, says Paul in this passage, is able to bless you abundantly.

And all these words are big words. They're words of size and significance. Blessing you abundantly.

[5 : 31] Do we know that we are blessed abundantly? Do you know that you are blessed abundantly this morning? Now, things might be tough. And let's be right, things can be tough.

Things can be exhausting and upsetting and upsetting and difficult and challenging and tiring and all those sort of words.

That God blesses us and is able to bless us abundantly. There's this nice quote in this passage from Psalm 112.

Freely scattered gifts to the poor. And the imagery there is almost of just randomly chucking nice stuff around the people.

Not in a chaotic, careless way, but in a here's a bit, here's a bit, here's a bit, here's a bit, here's a bit. Go, go, go, go, go, have. And I was trying to think about this and thinking about what I've seen, and I don't think it's a very good example, when you see communities who have been devastated by some sort of natural disaster, a hurricane or a flood or something, people arriving with lorry loads of food and just chucking the food off the back of a lorry.

And it's not a very good image. It's not perfect. But that idea that we scatter, and God scatters his goodness to us.

[7 : 00] And then Paul goes on to say in this passage that we will be enriched. We will be enriched so that we can be generous.

Do you see what's going on here? Do you see the equation that Paul is building here? God has given us unutterable, indescribable amounts of goodness, blessing, kindness, generosity, and all that sort of stuff.

And the purpose of that is twofold. One is because he wants us to be his children. He wants us to be saved. He wants us to be part of his family. He wants us to be, he wants you and me to be in part of Whitby Christian Fellowship, if you're visiting us, part of your home church.

But he also blesses us indescribably, unutterably, because he wants others to be blessed by and through us, by and through our actions.

Because your generosity will lead to thanksgiving to God. Our generosity, my generosity, your generosity will lead people to give thanks to God, to get to know God, to be blessed by God, and to be part of his ever-growing kingdom.

[8 : 30] So your generosity today, this week, last week, into the future, meets the needs of others.

It gives thanks to God. You are blessing God. You are giving thanks to God. But you are, others will give thanks to God, and leads others to praise God, and then to pray for you.

So there's a comeback, a payback. It isn't, by the way, some sort of slot machine. You put in some generosity, press the button, and it comes out with some blessing.

That's not how it works. It's much more about God can't help but bless us. It's his character. It's his purpose.

It's who he is. And so as we are generous in our heart, we are blessed. Let's go to the next slide, please.

[9 : 33] And we worship a generous God. I've said much of this already, but I just want to take it a bit further. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Goodness me, every spiritual blessing in Christ. And that's for each of us to work out what that means for each of us.

Because the way that you are blessed will be different from the way I am blessed. That's because I'm different from you, for which you should give great thanks every day. But you are blessed with every spiritual blessing.

In heaven we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he has lavished on us. I love this verse, Ephesians 1.

Lavished. Lavished is the most wonderful word. It oozes generosity. The only way I can describe this verse in a way that I understand is if you have some apple crumble, which is, by any description, the best pudding in the world, all right?

[10 : 57] And there is no debate about that. I will not take any conversation about that. Apple crumble. But if you have apple crumble, you have to have custard.

Ice cream, no. Cream, wrong. Custard. And if you have custard on apple crumble, and they give you a little bit, if you go to a posh restaurant and they bring it in a jug about, that'd be, uh-uh.

Uh-uh. The custard has to be lavished on the apple crumble. I know it's not a great analogy, but would you go there with me? God lavishes his grace.

He doesn't bring a little bit of grace in a posh jug and call it grace anglaise. It comes in a great big pot, but it's called custard.

I'm going to get into theological trouble in a minute, so I might move on. God lavishes his grace on us.

[12:05] Go home and reflect on that. Go home and give thanks for that, whatever your circumstance today. Ask and it will be given.

Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives. The one who seeks finds. And the one who knocks, the door will be opened to you. You know that verse well.

It's a famous, well-known verse. It will be given to you. You will find. The door will be opened to you. There's no equivocation about that. It's just going to happen.

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father. Good and perfect gift.

The point I'm making here, and it's not a very complicated point, is we worship a generous God.

And there are days and there are times when I will go empty to God.

[13:05] I will feel empty. Partly, or sometimes because I'm tired. Sometimes because I'm grumpy. Sometimes because I don't feel particularly good about my relationship with God.

Sometimes whatever. And I will go and say, God, I need you. I need you. And God smiles and says, no problem.

I'm going to lavish my grace upon you. So wherever you are today, whatever circumstance, whatever life is chucking at you today, and I don't want to be naive, and I don't want to pretend it's always easy, because it ain't.

But the constant here is that we worship a generous God. Next slide, please. John Mark Comer.

I looked for a picture of John Mark Comer. I got the worst I could find. I realise he looks like he's about to nut you or something. Apparently he's a very nice man, so he's not.

[14:15] But anyway, there you are. That's John Mark Comer for you. He writes this, as we slow down and arrange our lives around their centre in Jesus, this new simplicity of life will in turn enable generosity, the giving of our extra resources to God and those in need.

This opens all sorts of new possibilities. I'll come to that last point in a minute. But our generosity, as we, and one of the things that this book and the writings of Comer really is good at is saying, whoa, slow down.

Just slow down. Just be a little bit less in a hurry. And allow yourself the space to God, for God to speak into whatever is going on.

The last couple of weeks I've been bouncing up and down the country. That's what happens sometimes with my job and it's absolutely fine. But there was a day this week when I had to be, I wanted to get to the office I was working in in another part of the country a little bit early and everything was just a little bit running late.

The trains were running late. There wasn't a taxi at the station. And I was getting more and more, come on, come on, come on. And then I just told myself to slow down.

[15:51] Calm down. This is not a good thing. It will happen when it happens. And you know what? It did. I got there in time and rather surprisingly in my mind God knew better than I did.

Who knew that that was a thing? As we slow down God opens up all sorts of new possibilities in your life.

All sorts of things that you can do for Him. You can bless other people. You can get into this lovely circle of generosity. God blesses you.

You bless somebody else. They bless God. Isn't it wonderful? What a lovely, lovely circle. And then Comer says this is one of the most joyful of all the practices.

Isn't that interesting? Of all the things that we've talked about already in this series and talk about later on, this is one of the most joyful.

[17:01] joyful. So when we think about generosity we think about this is really good fun. This is a real blessing. This is something that we should giggle as we do it.

Because God blesses us so much as we find our space and our time and our calling to be generous.

So let's just think about that for a minute. If you have the next slide please. Joyful generosity. It's a nice little phrase, little thought that.

Each of you should give to 2 Corinthians 9 each of you should give what you have declared in your heart to give not reluctantly or under compulsion for God loves a cheerful giver.

And I like this word. The Greek for cheerful here is hilaros and that gives us the word funny.

[18 : 03] Hilarious. Hilarious. God loves a hilarious giver. Giggle as you give. Alright. Giggle as you bless.

Enjoy your generosity. Enjoy the fact that you're being generous. Delight in the fact that you're being generous. Have fun with the fact that you're being generous.

generous. Because as we do that God loves it and as we do that he blesses us with all spiritual blessings.

Now let me be really clear this is not just about money. Okay. This is not just about money. Let's go to the next slide please.

show you. We can be generous with all sorts of things. All sorts of things. Our time.

[19 : 06] Generosity with our time. We live in a time poor society. If you talk to people they will often tell you that they're busy. If you talk to me I will often tell you that I'm busy.

I'm cross with myself because I tell people too much that. It's just a statement of fact. I don't know why I need to repeat it. So I need to stop it. How are we generous with our time?

How do you use the time that you do if you think about a 24 hour period? Now some of it you'll be doing some sleeping. Sleeping is good.

For those of us that didn't have to get up in the morning for any other reason we had a whole extra hour. I think we should do that every day or at least every week. Wouldn't that be good fun?

Anyway. Except that then you have to come down in the morning and change the kitchen clock or the cooker clock and the microwave clock and that takes the hour that you've gained just by doing those things.

[20 : 10] But at least you can do it. How do you use your time? And what happens when somebody says could you help? Could you come and do?

Could you come and be with me? What about those folk who just need a bit of company? Those folk who just need a bit of a conversation?

Yeah, I haven't got time today. I'll do it tomorrow. Well, that's not what I need. I need it today. Of course, we need to be careful and boundaries are really important and we mustn't drive ourselves into the ground.

but a real prayer that we can take to God is, God, how do you want me to use my time? The day that you have given me, the day that as I wake up there are new mercies from heaven every day. What can I do with that time? How can I be generous with that time? Love. We're called to love one another.

[21 : 17] And that includes acts of kindness. I've been doing a lot of thinking recently about acts of kindness. And what does that mean? And sometimes in the old days, before things changed, it meant going along a line of parking meters and putting a pound in each parking meter so people get a bit more time.

Now you can't do that because you have to pay for parking on an app that takes 17 hours to get it so the shops have shut before you have parked up. What does love mean?

What do acts of kindness mean? How do we love each other in this church? How do we demonstrate that love for each other, that kindness to each other, that real desire to bless each other?

Do I want the best for each of you here? do I want to be generous in finding ways that I can help you find the best? Because that's what we have to do.

Resources. What have you got that you can share, that you can give, that you can whatever?

[22 : 35] And this isn't, again, we've not even got to money yet, by the way. This is lawnmowers, paintbrushes, sewing machines, I don't know, all sorts of stuff.

What have you got? Because I look around our house and I think, goodness, we've got a lot of stuff. And most of it doesn't get the light of day very often.

Who could do with it? Who wants to borrow it? Who wants to have it? We have this wonderful out for now group that many of us are part of.

Almost everything that goes on that, somebody will say, oh, I really want one of those. Why did you want a left-handed ladle? I just really wanted a left-handed marvellous.

We've got one here. What resources do you have? Do you have a car? Can you give a lift?

[23 : 38] Do you have a bicycle? Can you give a lift? A bit more fun. Have you got something that you can share? Be generous with.

Skills and knowledge. As you know very well, those of you who know me, I'm always willing to share my DIY skills.

You want a shelf putting up? Give me a ring. Your wall will fall down. What can I do that maybe you can't? And much more importantly, what can you do that maybe I can't?

What skills do you have? What knowledge do you have? Who knows about this sort of thing? And that goes all over the place. It just becomes something that we become a community.

community. Who in this church knows about that? Well, let's go and talk to them. I wonder whether they will be generous with their time, they'll be generous with their resources, and they'll be generous with their skills and knowledge.

[24 : 43] Do you see that this is the generosity, the purpose of generosity is first of all to bless us and bless God, but it's equally about building a community. Being part of the family of Jesus Christ in Whitby Christian Fellowship at Westcliff Church.

And we see as we look around this building the generosity, particularly of three people, four people, but of many people who have just turned this place into a wonderful place of worship where we bless the community.

And as I sat outside for a few minutes earlier on, a lady came in just because she heard the singing. She heard the name of Jesus being proclaimed onto the pavement.

And she said, I just want to listen for a few minutes. I used to go to church and I've walked away. Now, sadly, she had to go and do something else.

I wonder what happens. I wonder where that story will go. And I wonder whether she might find her way home. Are we a community?

[25 : 51] Can we develop that community of generosity? Next slide, please. Let's talk money, shall we?

You knew it had to happen. As Jesus looked up, he saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put two very small copper coins.

Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.

If you've ever been to Sunday school, you have acted this out. It's just one of those things, it's a bit like Goliath, you all know about it. This is a story about people pretending to be generous and somebody not pretending and actually being generous.

Blessing through money. Giving away from our wealth is something which is good to do, absolutely right to do.

[27 : 07] But if we do it with show, if we show off and want blessing on this earth, we miss out on blessing from heaven. Okay?

And that's why it's very important to think about our financial giving, our financial generosity, in a way which doesn't demand some sort of payback.

There are churches, and I say this advisedly, I don't mean this to be terrifically negative, there are many churches in the United States where the giving, the tithing of people are published in the monthly notice sheet.

So, Andy Lloyd gave four pence. Somebody else gave 40 pence, so they're 10 times better.

Somebody else who's four pounds, they're 10 times better time.

Okay? It happens. I've seen it. And it made me feel ill. Not because, well, yeah, let's not go there.

[28 : 16] The first thing to say is our giving, particularly our financial giving, needs to be as hidden as it can be. Now, we can go the other way and get so coy that it gets a bit complicated.

Yeah? Just give. Just give because you give. Okay? But also, it isn't the amount.

It isn't the amount that we give. Let's go to the next slide if we can. Our giving is absolutely, primarily, and centrally between us and God.

Okay? And that is about, and if we go back to the passage that I read earlier, let me just find it. the two Corinthians passage. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give.

The code there is we should give what we have come to an agreement with God to give. Now, many people, and I would include me in that, find tithing a really helpful starting point, a good concept.

[29 : 27] It helps. It gives me a sort of ballpark. But the important thing here is, not how much we give, it's that we have decided, having taught to God about it, what we shall give.

And so, we need to take our financial giving seriously to God, and ask him what he wants us to give.

Because he might say, well, actually, I'd like you to give 5% away. Or he might say, I'd like you to give 25% away.

And we mustn't get into an argument about that, and get legalistic about, oh, well, it's only 10%, isn't it? But I'm asking you to do more than that. So, this is about our conversation with God about financial giving.

Because we live in a place of freedom and not regulation. And then going on from that, when you have come to a view about what you will give before God, and you've agreed before God to give it, not through compulsion, but because you choose to, give it away with great joy.

[30 : 47] Be delighted as you give it away. Be thrilled as you see the money winging out of your bank account into wherever it's going, knowing that God will bless you.

As a church here, we have known God's financial blessing in quite extraordinary ways. I don't want to go into that detail now, but we are just blessed by God.

And there are things that are happening that you think, goodness me, God is providing for our needs in a miraculous way. Whatever you do, whatever you give, do it joyfully.

If you resent what you give, it creates all sorts of problems. Because then you get into it, if only I hadn't given that away, I could have afforded whatever you could have afforded.

love you. And so, with respect to Mug's game, to give away and resent it, don't do it. Don't give.

[31 : 58] If you're not doing it joyfully, hilariously, delightedly, with great joy, don't give. Because it's coming from the wrong place. And so, where we're at here is this really interesting place and situation for us.

God has given you stuff, knowledge, skills, ability, time, love, and he wants you to give it away. And as you give it away, he'll bless you.

And as he'll give it away, he'll meet your needs. And as he'll give it away, others will be blessed and the family of Christians in Whitby Christian Fellowship will grow.

which is all wonderful as long as our attitude is right, as long as our behaviour is right, as long as our willingness to be led not by our own pride or our own desire for position, but actually the desire, the aching desire that we bless God and we bless others through him.

and so as we just go to the final slide please, generosity is part of our worship of almighty God.

[33 : 30] It's a response to his unutterable generosity to us. Our generosity is a lifestyle and an attitude and our generosity is much, much more than money and finally our attitude is so very, very joyful.

Amen. Amen.