

Acts 2:42-47
Do You Believe In Giving?

I. Intro

When is the last time you were shockingly generous?

I'm not actually trying to start out this morning out on a convicting note. I know a lot of you... and I think many of you could truly answer this question. So hear that differently... when was the last time you were generous?

We are talking about the church this month. We are asking each other some important questions as we check in and remind ourselves who we are. Last week we asked... do you believe in community and we challenged each other to press into community groups. This week we are asking the question, do you believe in generosity?

Now I know some of you are immediately thinking this is a giving sermon. And you are starting to get all nervous. Frankly, the question – do you believe in generosity... it's so much more than that.

Today we are looking at a passage where we see the shocking generosity of the church.

And my challenge to you today is to ask God to grow you in your generosity... You see generosity is not something you arrive at... it's something you grow in.

The principle we will learn today is this: **When you realize that the gospel has met your greatest need you will become part of a shockingly generous community.**

So here is what we are going to do today:

What does it look like to be shockingly generous?

Where does becoming shockingly generous begin?

How do we become shockingly generous?

What is it, where does it begin, and how do we become shockingly generous?

II. What does it look like to be shockingly generous? (2:45)

Look at this community in Acts. Their pursuit wasn't their stuff.

Their pursuit, their distinctive, was they were shockingly generous. They gave away their stuff to meet each other's need. The way this is written it implies an ongoing action. As there was a need, they would sell their things to help those in need.

Now, I know what you are thinking... Brian you're not saying that we should sell all of our stuff? Right? That's not what your saying? Right? I mean surly you are not saying that?

I would say this, I think you are asking the wrong question... the question is:

Do I get defensive when people ask me to use my money and my things for something besides myself?

Because if you do, it's probably worth exploring that and probing that more.

Let me suggest to you four aspects to be shockingly generous that will help tease out what looks like...

a. You will have a stewardship perspective.

Why is it that selfishness doesn't have to be taught? Do you ever find yourself saying to your kids, stop sharing so much?! No! We are constantly saying... share. Share... Why?! Because we value generosity in people, but it's not a natural thing. It is something that is learned. And when we are around generosity it's a beautiful thing.

Everyone look at your neighbor and say... I like generous people...

Why was this community so generous? It's because they understood that their stuff wasn't theirs. It was given to them as a gift. God is the giver of all good things: your job, your house, your car, your savings. And people who are shockingly generous understand that God has entrusted them with their stuff.

Take an inventory of your heart. Do you believe that you are a steward, or do you believe that you are an owner?

Another aspect of being shockingly generous is this...

b. You will change the way you live.

I would like to distinguish between random acts of kindness (which are good) and shockingly generous people. I was going through the drive through of Chic-Fila the other day and the car in front of me paid for my meal. I was surprised and so grateful. But I would like to put that in the category of a 'random act of kindness'.

To be shockingly generous means that you will give in such a way that it will cause you to change the way you live. Look... this church... they weren't just buying people a chic-fila sandwiches. They were changing the way they lived. They saw needs, and in order to meet those needs they had to adjust their lifestyles.

Take an inventory of your heart. Do you desire to give in such a way that it causes you to change your lifestyle?

A third aspect is...

c. You will give to what you love.

This early church just had a radical encounter with the gospel of Jesus Christ and their whole paradigm was changed. They saw the world through a totally different lens. They understood they were stewards, they changed the way they lived... and they changed what they loved.

Jesus once said: **Matt. 6:21 Where your treasure is there your heart will be also.**

Preachers like to say your checkbook is a great place to see how much you love God. Why do they say that? Because we will joyfully give to the things that we love. We will joyfully give to buy Cardinals tickets if we love the Cardinals. You will joyfully give to your kids if you love your kids.

And when you are giving to the things you love you don't ask how much do I 'have' to spend, you ask how much 'can' I spend. Do you recognize the difference? The things you don't love... you say 'ugh'... alright how much is it? How much do I have to spend? But the things we love, we give generously to.

In fact... anything that you really love, you have to stop yourself from spending on.

Can I meddle here a little bit in our lives? Take an inventory of your heart... What's your perspective on giving to the church? And giving to the needs of the church? When you get a raise at work, are you excited that you can give more? Excited that you can be more generous? Do you find yourself wanting to increase your giving to the work of God?

A fourth aspect is this...

d. You will know it when you see it.

Let me illustrate this for you with two stories.

When I was in college in the 90's I used to lead worship. Now, back then we didn't have fancy projectors like these. We had something called an overhead projector.

Anyway, I had been asked to lead worship at a camp for 200 students. I was super pumped about it. I had picked out some great songs, put together the sheets for the projector and was ready to go. Well... I drove out to the camp and as I'm pulling in it hits me... the projector. So, I got to a payphone and called one of my friends, Riad. I asked him to go to my room and see if the projector was there... and sure enough I left it on my bed. Well I had arrived at 5pm and the conference was starting at 7:30. There was no way I could make it back. So I just decided to suck it up and ask everyone to sing from memory. I mean what was I going to do?

You know what happened... true story... at 7:10... just over two hours later... Riad walks into the room carrying the projector. Can I tell you I was so impacted by that? I mean this guy... changed his plans, gave his time and resources to meet a need. And it moved me. I knew it when I saw it... that was shockingly generous.

Let illustrate this another way... I think my parents are some of the most generous people I know. They are generous with their time, and they are extremely generous with their money. I've always had a sense that my parents were generous. But it was probably about 8 years ago it really hit me. My kids were around 4, 7, and 10. And I remember cooking dinner for them. A pretty good meal actually. It took some time to put together. And we had a great dinner. And then we dinner was over everyone scattered. And what was left? A huge, massive, pile of dishes. And I was so mad. And I was doing the dishes with fervor and passion. And then I said those famous words: I was never like that. And then I thought: did I do that? And then I had that moment where like my whole teenage life passed before my eyes, and I saw it. I was like... wow, my parents were shockingly generous people.

What does it look like to be shockingly generous?

Shockingly generous people have a stewardship perspective, that changes the way they live and therefore give because of their love for God. And it is obvious!

Now... where does giving like that begin?

III. Where does becoming shockingly generous begin? (2:44)

In community. This is what we do together. Look at verse 44. There was a unity that existed between the church.

A real comradery. A fellowship.

Becoming shockingly generous begins in community.

Now, this is a complicated point, but I think it's here in the text. I realize that this is teaching something that is counter-intuitive to us. Our world has changed from being a communal world to being an individualistic world.

In the world of Jesus... they understood the idea of doing life together. They grew up understanding it. We have to fight to do life together. The culture that you have grown up in says you are the center of your world.

And for this church... being in communion together, have true unity, it meant that they were open and transparent about their finances.

Do you know that Jesus, in Luke 12:15, warns his followers to beware of greed? Why do you think that is?

When was the last time you found yourself confessing that you were greedy? I mean really... when was the last time? Listen... Jesus is warning us because none of think we are greedy. We all know people that have more money than us and so we all get tricked into thinking that it's the rich who are greedy. And because there are lots of people who have more than us we must not be rich and therefore there is no way I am greedy.

Friends, it's not the amount of money you make that determines whether you are greedy or not.

And this is why generosity begins in community. We need each other to help us watch out for greed.

Now... can I be honest with you... isn't this starting to get weighty. I mean when you start fleshing all of this out, we described a shockingly generous person, and we see that where this begins is in community... isn't this starting to feel really, really hard to get to? Well let's ask the question then...

IV. How do we become shockingly generous?

I think there is something that is really helpful here in this passage.

Look at verse 45 again. They were giving to any who had need?

How you understand need is how you become shockingly generous.

Jesus told a parable that helps us unpack this. It's called the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Can I just read it to you, and let's just listen. I didn't put it on the screen. I want you to just hear the parable.

There are three men in this story who encounter a man in need. Listen for the similarity between them all.

Luke 10:30-37

All three of these men... all three of them saw the need of the man, but only one man met the need. The Samaritan. Why? Because he saw the need...

Do you have a lens to see people's need? Are you able to look at others and see like the Samaritan did?

This leads us to another question... when you hear this story, who are you? You see most of us, we want to be the good Samaritan, we want to try to be that man... but until you realize that Jesus was telling this parable to say, you are the one in need, you are the one dying on the side of the road, you have a need that is so impossible to bear, and I Jesus came along and met your need. I came along and was shockingly generous to you.

Listen, friends,

We will start to become shockingly generous when we realize that Jesus has met our greatest need.

You see, in God's economy it is the needy who are rich.

I chose the word realize on purpose.

To realize is to make real and give reality to. To bring vividly to mind, to grasp clearly. We need to vividly grasp this. It needs to become more real to us. The more real it is to us, that Jesus, on the cross gave everything He had for us. He became poor so that my greatest need, knowing Him, might become a reality.

When you realize that the gospel has met your greatest need you will become part of a shockingly generous community.

IV. Conclusion

When was the last time you were shockingly generous?

Friends, let's ask God to make the work of Jesus so real in our lives so that we will become a shockingly generous community! Shockingly generous to each other, shockingly generous to the church, and shockingly generous to the world.