

YOU CAN'T OUT-GIVE GOD

Welcome to **Week 6 of Spirit and Truth!** I hope that everyone has had a wonderful Thanksgiving and had an opportunity to enjoy your time with family and friends! If there is ever a time of year that GIVING and GENEROSITY are to be a theme it is certainly this time of year as we just celebrated THANKSGIVING and where CHRISTMAS is just a few short weeks away. But when it comes to the life of a believer, GIVING and GENEROSITY ought not to be something that is only thought about a couple of times a year in NOVEMBER and DECEMBER. It really should be the theme of your daily life. And no one has been a greater example of that than the GOD we call FATHER, and the SON JESUS whom the FATHER has given us so that we can experience forgiveness and salvation. In fact, our FATHER in heaven is constantly giving to us. He gives us this WORLD we live in. He gives us RESOURCES with which to sustain us through this life. He gives us BREATH of LIFE so that we can be a living being. He gives us SALVATION and FORGIVENESS of sin so we can have a relationship with Him. He gives us the HOLY SPIRIT in order to help us live the new life He desires to give us. He gives us ETERNAL LIFE and a chance to be with Him forever. Our God is a GOOD GIFT GIVER and He is always GIVING and He never changes when it comes to His generosity.

James 1:17 (NIV) 17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

One of our core values here at Vertical Church is that **"YOU CAN'T OUT-GIVE GOD."** As I have pastored in this church over the last 12 years I have seen it over and over again within the finances of this church. When we are generous, (giving to those in need, giving so that other ministries can operate, giving so churches can be planted around the world) God is generous to us. I have witnessed it in my own life personally. Once I made the decision to live my life with an open hand toward God and toward others I have seen God work miracles in my personal finances. This should not be a surprise to us! If God's vehicle for taking the Gospel to the world is the church, which we have been talking about over the last FIVE WEEKS, then how else would this be possible if we (the church, the followers of Jesus) did not live our daily lives with a spirit of generosity? But here's the thing about GENEROSITY as God defines it! The heart of generosity is not when we give out of compulsion. Compulsion is sporadic and ebbs and flows depending on how compelling you feel the need may be at the moment. The source of compulsion isn't love and joy. The source of compulsion is pressure and coercion. There's no freedom with compulsions. The heart of generosity is also not when we give because we have been manipulated out of a sense of guilt or a sense of urgency. This too is sporadic and results in giving as a way to satisfy the emotions you feel in the moment. Again there is no freedom with manipulation. These motivations both tend to be self-centered and are inconsistent depending on our feelings and emotions. A true heart of generosity has to come from a different place and has to be given with a different attitude that flows from a different source. This is the generosity that should motivate us everyday. This is the generosity that takes the Gospel to the world! So, as we engage with God's word today how would you define your generosity? And btw, when I use the word GENEROSITY I am not just talking in terms of money. I am also talking about your TIME, your TALENT as well as your TREASURE! So, when it comes to

GENEROSITY Is your generosity a sporadic exercise usually motivated by compulsion or manipulation? Or, is your generosity the heartbeat of your life fueled by your love for God? Well, in order to help you identify what type of generosity guides your life let's see what Paul has to say to the Corinthian church about the type of generosity that should be the heartbeat of our life. If you have your Bible, turn with me to **2 Corinthians 9** and while you are doing that I am going to set the context for the passage we are going to look at this morning.

At the time Paul was writing his letter to the church at Corinth the church in Jerusalem was struggling financially due to intense persecution. As a result, the poor among them were in great need. Paul, as he was on his missionary journey, was informing the new churches he was planting about the growing need back in Jerusalem. Hearing of this great need, several churches expressed a desire to collect money and send it to the church in Jerusalem. The Corinthian church was one of those churches. Paul is informing them in this second letter to the believers in Corinth that he is sending some brothers in advance to finalize the arrangements for the gift that had been promised so that they would have proper time to prepare it. Paul wanted to give those who had a desire to give an opportunity to do so willingly and generously without feeling obligated or the pressure to do so before they were ready. After explaining that at the beginning of Chapter 9 Paul then goes on to define for us THREE Characteristics that are true of real GENEROSITY.

2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-10 (NIV)

6 Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. **7** 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. God wants us to give willingly from a place of love and freedom. Not from a place of unwillingness or being forced. **8** 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. **9** As it is written: "They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever." **10** Now he who supplies 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.

Characteristic #1 - True GENEROSITY is a heart response to a GENEROUS GOD

Like with all things GOOD it has to start with God first! Take LOVE for instance. We know nothing about love unless God first loved us! **1 John 4:19 (NIV)** We love because he first loved us. Just like LOVE we know nothing about GENEROSITY unless God shows us GENEROSITY first. If we are going to be motivated by true generosity that motivation has to begin as a response to what we have experienced from God. Generous GIVERS have experienced a GENEROUS God.

Notice the standard in which we are to GIVE:

2 Corinthians 9:7-9 (NIV) 7 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. **8** 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. **9** As it is written: “They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever.”

First, we are to GIVE as you have decided in your heart WILLINGLY, not forced or out of obligation. All throughout scripture if you study GIVING it is always framed within the context of one giving willingly! In fact, God would say that if you give out of obligation or because you feel like you have to give then you are not really giving at all.

Secondly, we are to GIVE CHEERFULLY because it is GOOD and it invites GOD into the process to work and BLESS. If it is something GOOD we should want to do it and we should find joy in it. We know that it is pleasing to God and it is a blessing to those that receive it. In fact, this is why it should be a blessing to us, because others are blessed!

Paul starts out with the REAP and SOW principle. This of course is an agricultural reference. You cannot REAP (or HARVEST) 1 acre of corn unless you SOW (or PLANT) 1 acre of corn seed. When it comes to life you will not reap LOVE, KINDNESS or GENEROSITY yourselves unless you first sow LOVE, KINDNESS, and GENEROSITY into the lives of others. But this is where Paul drives home a very important aspect of the reap and sow principle. Before we REAP we must SOW. You cannot SOW without SEED. Who supplies the SEED?

2 Corinthians 9:10 (NIV)10 Now he who supplies 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.

GOD DOES!! He is the one who increases your SEED and He is the one who increases the AMOUNT you harvest or REAP. GOD is at both ends of the REAP AND SOW process!!! The farmer understands that God provides the seed and God determines the harvest. You and I determine how much is planted. If you do not participate you get nothing. What you put in is what you get out of it. In the end it isn't about you and I it is ALL about HIM! We need to get over the mentality of "I deserve to reap good things". We should remember that we really don't deserve anything, and all we do have is because of God's grace. So how are we using what God has blessed us with to bring Him glory?

Once I came to terms with what God had given me by providing His SON for my salvation, how can I respond any other way but with a heart of generosity? Whether it be with my time, talent or treasure. How can I take from God who gives to me so lavishly and hold back from others or from God with a stingy heart.

True GENEROSITY is a heart response to a GENEROUS GOD. Notice what else Paul says.

2 Corinthians 9:11-12 (NIV) 11 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. **12** 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. **13** 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 with everyone else. **14** And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you.

Characteristic #2 - True GENEROSITY results in a consistent expression of love that leads others to praise God

When we are truly generous God is automatically glorified! Especially when we are moved to generosity out of our love for God and the generosity He has shown us. This is a generosity given out expecting nothing in return. We give not because we are concerned about ourselves or with glorifying our own name. We give out of LOVE and when LOVE is our motive we give when we see others in need. We want to bless them and bring glory to God. Notice that when we do we are also enriched so that we can continue our generosity on every occasion that presents itself. Not only do people have their needs met but it causes others to give praise and thanksgiving to God.

Notice what Paul says in verse 13. The generosity of the Corinthians provided an important opportunity for them to show the genuineness of their faith. The Jewish believers were already doubting the validity of the Gentile believer's faith due to the many problems within the Corinthian church and because they were Gentiles. Their actions of generosity gave them an opportunity to put those doubts to rest. Faith is more than belief. It is belief that leads to action based on what you believe. There really is no greater practical demonstration of faith than to take resources which belong to you that could be used for yourself and give that to others who are in need or to the church to help with the advancement of the Gospel and trust God to supply what you need. In fact, the way we care for one another shows the world we belong to Jesus.

John 13:35 (NIV) 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

This is also the kind of generosity that defined the early church!

Acts 2:42-47 (NIV) 42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. **43** Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. **44** All the believers were together and had everything in common. **45** They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Are willing to do this? **46** Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, **47** praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Grace has been generously given to us, not so we can hoard it unto ourselves, but so that we can give it away to others! Is this not the Gospel we have been given? What we have been given is to be shared with the world. **True GENEROSITY is a heart response to a GENEROUS GOD. True GENEROSITY results in a consistent expression of love that leads others to praise God.** And finally,

Characteristic #3 - True GENEROSITY results in opportunities to share the GOSPEL

2 Corinthians 9:15 (NIV) 15 Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

Paul basically summarizes his exchange with the Corinthians by comparing the believer's act of GIVING with what God did by giving us Jesus Christ (who btw, is the "indescribable gift") The gift of all gifts. The greatest demonstration of generosity ever! You see God sowed His Son and reaped an incredible harvest of those who placed their faith in the resurrected Christ. Whenever you and I give joyfully, sacrificially, and abundantly we demonstrate Jesus and His likeness. We make a way for the Gospel to be demonstrated in a tangible way. This kind of generosity is very rare in today's world. It causes people to turn their heads and take notice. It causes them to ask the question WHY? This gives us a platform to point them to Jesus.

Worship Comes Back Up

So what defines you GENEROSITY? What moves you to GIVE? Give of your TIME, TALENT and TREASURE! **Is your generosity inconsistent and often motivated by compulsions or manipulations of your emotions? Or, is your generosity the heartbeat of your life fueled by your love for God? Is it a heart response to a GENEROUS GOD. Is it a consistent expression of love that leads others to give God glory? Does it give you an opportunity to share the GOSPEL?**

Do you realize what Jesus has GIVEN you? Ultimately, God has blessed you so that you can be a blessing!

What do you feel called to give that you're reluctant to let go of? Regarding your Time, your Talent and your Treasure!

Do you believe that God will meet your needs if you give away what you have amassed to meet your own needs? If you are not depending on God you see Him as unreliable.

This also applies to empathy, love and to the care we provide others. When we are stingy with giving ourselves away in service to God and others or in giving our resources away to God or others we are being stingy with the Gospel.

Proverbs 11:24-26 (NIV) 24 One person gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. 25 A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed. 26 People curse the one who hoards grain, but they pray God's blessing on the one who is willing to sell.

Which do you want to be? A Blessing or a Curse? You want to be RICH or POOR? You have been blessed to be a blessing! Will you surrender your life to the ONE who gave you ALL of Himself?