

Now For Then - A Life of Joyful Generosity - Week 3

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As we approach Christmas, we are remembering God's gracious gift of Jesus to us, redeeming and rescuing us with generous love, that we would be a gracious, generous people who bring glory to God.

Generosity is a matter of the heart – and unless our hearts have been transformed by the love and grace of God, we are unable to extend grace and generosity towards others. How is your heart today?

When it comes to life before God and one another, we have been looking at this passage in **1 Tim 6:17-19...**

¹⁷As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. ¹⁸They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, ¹⁹thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

Last week we looked at biblical framework towards giving, financial stewardship, and generosity – affirming there is in fact intended outcome for our obedience, that as we give back to God our first and best, it reminds us that He is our provider, that all things belong to Him, and that we are stewards of His resources here on earth. The risk - in addition to disobedience before God - is that if we don't practice obedience in giving of our financial resources back to God, we can tend to think that life and our money is about us which will only lead to greater disobedience.

In the same way, if we don't live in a posture of love towards the body of Christ, the people of God and if we don't live with an intentional posture to "be rich in good deeds" towards others – we trend towards thinking that life is about us. How many of you know the joy found in serving other people in Jesus name?

This morning, I want to remind us all – that we have been redeemed for a reason, for a purpose; we have been forgiven and made new for a reason, for a purpose; we have experienced God's grace and mercy for a reason, for a clear purpose. I want us to "take hold of that which is truly life"

The world tends to market to us the illusion that the "holiday season" will make all things delightful and happy, merry and bright, and somehow this time of year has the powerful ability to take us back in our emotions and memories. For some of us, this is warm and pleasant, yet for others this will be a Christmas without a loved one, or for others a Christmas with a new diagnosis, or for others a Christmas facing very difficult circumstances.

Friends, take heart. Take a breath. Remember – God truly is good and all the promises He's given us are trustworthy. God is faithful. God is love. God is just. God is rich in mercy. God has given us His very best in Jesus, that we would know Him, love Him, and glorify Him forever.

Paul writes to the church at Corinth – a city known for its idolatry and brokenness – and a city where the gospel took root and the Church began to shine the love and light of Christ – and this is what he says:

God of All Comfort

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. ⁵ For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. ⁶ If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. ⁷ Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.
(2 Co 1:3-7)

The Father of mercies and God of all comfort.
He comforts us in all our afflictions.

Who is afflicted today – and who is it today that needs the comfort of God and the Father of mercies?
If that is you – welcome. Who in your life needs comfort? Will you extend the life and love of Jesus to them?

Look at this dynamic at work in this passage:

God comforts us – the Father of mercies and God of all comfort

So that

We may be able to comfort those who are in ANY affliction with the comfort with which we are ourselves are comforted by God.

We share in sufferings SO THAT THROUGH CHRIST we share ABUNDANTLY in comfort too.
We share in suffering NOW and are comforted NOW for others so that THEN we can comfort others.
SUFFERINGS NOW. COMFORT NOW AND COMFORT FOR OTHERS THEN.
NOW FOR THEN.

If we are afflicted – it is our your comfort and salvation.

If we are comforted it is for your comfort as you patiently endure the same sufferings.

This is a powerful and important reminder – that we are not intended to suffer or find comfort alone, but in fellowship with God and one another.

I want to read to you from all the letters written to the early church, this reminder of belonging to each other, to see the “one another” way of life that followers of Jesus are to embrace:

Romans	12:5	Belong to one another*
	12:10	Be devoted to one another
	12:10	Honor one another
	12:16	Live in harmony with one another
	12:18	Live at peace with one another*
	15:7	Accept one another

1 Corinthians	1:10	Agree with one another
1 Corinthians	4:6	Don't take pride over against one another*
	10:24	Look out for one another*
	12:25	Have equal concern for one another*
Galatians	5:13	Serve one another
Galatians	5:15	Don't devour one another*
	5:26	Don't provoke one another*
	6:1	Carry one another's burdens*
Ephesians	4:2	Bear with one another*
	4:25	Speak truthfully with one another*
	4:32	Be kind to one another
	4:32	Be compassionate to one another
	4:32	Forgive one another
	5:19	Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs
	5:21	Submit to one another
Philippians	2:4	Look to the interests of one another*
Colossians	3:9	Don't lie to one another*
	3:13	Bear with one another*
	3:13	Forgive one another
	3:16	Teach one another
	3:16	Admonish one another
1 Thessalonians	4:9	Love one another*
	4:18	Encourage one another*
	5:11	Encourage one another
	5:11	Build up one another*
	5:13	Live in peace with one another*
	5:15	Be kind to one another*
Hebrews	10:24	Spur on one another
	10:25	Meet with one another*
	10:25	Encourage one another
	13:1	Love one another*
James	5:9	Don't grumble against one another*
	5:16	Confess your sins to one another*
	5:16	Pray for one another*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book LIFE TOGETHER ... "Who can give us the certainty that, in the confession and the forgiveness of our sins, we are not dealing with ourselves but with the living God? God gives us this certainty through our brother. Our brother breaks the circle of self-deception. A man who confesses his sins in the presence of a brother knows that he is no longer alone with himself. He experiences the presence of God in the reality of the other person"

1 Peter	1:22	Love one another
	3:8	Live in harmony with one another
	4:9	Offer hospitality to one another
1 John	1:7	Have fellowship with one another
	3:11	Love one another
	3:16	Lay down your lives for one another*
	3:23	Love one another
	4:7	Love one another
2 John	5	Love one another

So it makes sense — that as the early Church suffered persecution and life in a broken world – the same broken world we live in... that as the God of ALL COMFORT and the FATHER of mercies worked in the hearts of believers in the first century, He can and does the same thing today.

Encouragement to Give Generously

8 We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ² for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³ For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, ⁴ begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— ⁵ and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. ⁶ Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. ⁷ But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also.

(2 Co 8:1–7)

They gave themselves first to God – and then to one another. Joy in the midst of poverty.
A wealth of generosity from their lives.

I want to show you something: ***seeing God at work, seeing God with the eyes of our hearts, knowing His presence, walking in His power will always be enough when it comes to a life of generosity towards God and other people.***

Peter and John Before the Council

4 And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, ² greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. ³ And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. ⁴ But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.

⁵ On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, ⁶ with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. ⁷ And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, “By what power or by what name did you do this?” ⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders, ⁹ if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, ¹⁰ let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. ¹¹ This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. ¹² And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

¹³ Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. ¹⁴ But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. ¹⁵ But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, ¹⁶ saying, “What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷ But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name.” ¹⁸ So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John answered them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, ²⁰ for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.” ²¹ And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people, for all were praising God for what had happened. ²² For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old.

The Believers Pray for Boldness

²³ When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. ²⁴ And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, “Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, ²⁵ who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit,

“ ‘Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain?
²⁶ The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together,
 against the Lord and against his Anointed’ —

²⁷ for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸ to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. ²⁹ And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, ³⁰ while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

³¹ And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

They Had Everything in Common

³² Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. ³³ And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. ³⁴ There was not a needy person among them...

(Acts 4:1–34a)

These believers were facing opposition – and yet continued to worship. They were seeing God at work. They lifted up their voices together. They prayed. They were filled with the Holy Spirit. They spoke the word of God with boldness. They gladly shared their lives and possessions. Christ brought about unity in their lives. They shared their testimonies. Grace grace was upon them. There was not a needy person among them.

Seeing Jesus — and our whole life response to bring glory to Him. That’s the goal. May there be GREAT GRACE upon us all – that we too would posture ourselves first generously before God, and then from that generosity of His grace to us, that we would posture ourselves generously before one another, now and for then, with the certain hope we have because of eternal life with Him.