

# Not a Crowd, but a Family... ...of GENEROSITY

If we, as recipients of the most lavish outpouring of generosity, don't have anything to say about generosity, then we have probably missed something pretty central to our faith...

**There's something about speaking on generosity that allows us to get to the heart of the gospel.**

- Have someone read **Matt 6:1-6, 16-34**. What thoughts or themes stand out to people?
- **Read Matt 6:33** again...
- Richard Foster uses this verse to anchor his description and discussion of the spiritual discipline of **SIMPLICITY**.
- *Can anyone attempt a definition of simplicity, as it was discussed on Sunday?*

Simplicity can mean a few things... But "Simplicity" as it's defined in the spiritual disciplines does not refer to one's intelligence, status, or possessions — instead, it offers a way of living where we are no longer defined or driven by those things. Simplicity means living with God and His Kingdom at the centre of all we do – redeeming, reordering, and refining our priorities and our motivations.

It offers our heart freedom from its obsessive attachment to riches, rank and reputation – freedom to live contentedly; freedom to live generously.

Richard Foster describes our current condition: *"Inwardly modern man is fractured and fragmented. He is trapped in a maze of competing attachments. One moment he makes decisions on the basis of sound reason and the next moment out of fear of what others will think of him. He has no unity or focus around which life is oriented."*

Foster's gendered language has not dated well...but what he is describing has!

- Have a chat about that "fractured and fragmented" way of being...
- What "competing attachments" have you noticed?
- When are you tempted to make decisions out of fear of what others will think?

Jesus and the rest of the Bible have a lot to say about the shape of the Christian life as one of single-minded devotion. That is what really lies at the heart of simplicity – a simplicity of loyalty...a simplicity of lord-ship.

**But both Scripture and experience suggest two main obstacles lie in the way – can anyone remember what they were?!**

1. The first is what pop-philosopher Alain de Botton calls **STATUS ANXIETY**.

He writes: *"High status is thought by many (but freely admitted by few) to be one of the finest of earthly goods... Status anxiety is a worry,...that we are in danger of failing to conform to the ideals of success laid down by our society and that we may as a result be stripped of dignity and respect; a worry that we are currently occupying too low a rung or are about to fall to a lower one..."*

*"If our position on the ladder is a matter of such concern, it is because our self conception is so dependent upon what others make of us... Rare individuals aside (Socrates, Jesus) we rely on signs of respect from the world to feel tolerable to ourselves."*

*"Like confessing to envy (to which the emotion is related), it can be socially imprudent to reveal the extent of any [status] anxiety and, therefore, evidence of the inner drama is uncommon, limited usually to a preoccupied gaze, a brittle smile or an over-extended pause after news of another's achievement."*

### Isn't that a wonderful description?!

- Discuss your reactions to it.
- What ladders / rungs / currencies of status seem to be important or compared in the different communities that you are a part of? At work? School/University? Your wider family? Your children's progress? Your friends? At church? (There truly is no limit to the arenas in which we will engage in this sort of comparison.)

### Watch the clip of Jim Carrey at the Golden Globes – even if you have to do it off a phone!

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a9J8GaeDqVc>
- (Search YouTube for "Jim Carrey Golden Globe Awards 2016" – it's a 2 min. clip.)
- What's your reaction to that?
- It's easy to poke fun at a room full of celebrities – but what status symbols are WE chasing that ultimately won't fulfill us?
- The truth is that worrying too much about what others think, in any area of life, surrenders to them an authority that rightly belongs to God. **In the end, that becomes de-humanising.**

## 2. The second obstacle is **MATERIAL ANXIETY** ...

Nowhere is our divided loyalty more obvious than in the area of material wealth. Jesus knew it—which is why he warned us that we couldn't serve both wealth and him. The problem is not necessarily in the having, it's in the obsessive *hankering*. This is not about taking cheap shots at rich people. (Which we often define as anyone who's richer than us!) It's about confessing that we often live as though our satisfaction and security is to be found in those things.

In today's culture, the pressure to obtain a certain level of living can be relentless. To try and convince ourselves that we haven't succumbed, Richard Foster notes that we cleverly rename the vices: "Covetousness we call ambition. Hoarding we call prudence. Greed we call industry."

- Discuss!

**Again, this is profoundly dehumanising and, ultimately, profoundly enslaving.** Few of us could honestly say, as Paul does, that we have learned the freedom of contentment in all things.

- Foster again: *"Simplicity is the only thing that sufficiently reorients our lives so that material possessions can be genuinely enjoyed without destroying us..."*
- Destroyed with dissatisfaction...or worry, as Jesus makes clear in our Matt 6 reading. If ever there was a passage for our time, it's this one...
- Spend some time in discussion and prayer: **How might we begin to address our own senses of entitlement and begin to live lives marked by simplicity and generosity?**