



A Generous People

Message Notes, July 8, 2018

2 Corinthians 8:1-5, 9:6-11

Generosity goes well beyond tithing; it's fuller than giving money; it's a way of life! But it does include the giving of our financial resources. Our stuff so easily gets a hold of our hearts; to cultivate giving around our money is most often the key that unlocks the divine nature of generosity within us.

Why do we, as human beings, so readily connect to scenarios of giving and helping? Because we are made in the image of God. His nature echoes in our souls, and He is a giver!

Two passages that capture the nature of generosity are found in 2 Corinthians:

- 2 Corinthians 9:6-8 – This is Paul's address to the Corinthian church (a wealthy congregation), encouraging them to give to help the struggling church in Jerusalem. In his letter, Paul summarizes the cycle of generosity:
 - Generosity/generous appears many times in this letter to the Corinthian church. Paul employs three different Greek words in his narrative that, in summary, define generosity like this: Generosity is pure, sincere, whole-hearted giving that is full, abundant and rich in nature.
 - Paul lays out the "cycle of generosity": God's gracious provision >>> our gratitude >>> our joyful giving >>> God's pleasure and reward
 - This cycle begins with God (not us)
 - God's part in the cycle is fixed and unwavering
 - Our responses (gratitude and giving) are the variables that move it forward (or not)
 - God is delighted when we participate in His generous nature (opening the way for continued blessing)
 - Paul uses the farming metaphor of sowing and reaping: "If we sow (give) generously, we will reap generously. If we sow (give) sparingly, we will reap sparingly.
 - There is strength and blessing in the discipline of tithing, but a life of generosity goes well beyond this discipline.
 - Generosity invites us to live freely and joyfully in the giving of our money, things, time, talents, words, compliments ...
 - Tithing is a 10% mindset. Generosity is a 100% mindset.
 - A life of generosity is not something God wants FROM us, but rather something He wants FOR us.

Keith shared how God has moved him from a disciplined heart of tithing to a joyful heart of generosity. God has certainly used the scriptures (Genesis 12:2-3, Proverbs 11:24-25, Malachi 3:8-10 and many more) to reveal this richer posture, but He has especially used the lives of generous people to open Keith's heart to generous giving. This leads to the second Corinthians passage where Paul is telling of the generous heart of the Macedonian church:

- 2 Corinthians 8:1-5 – Paul writes (to the stingy Corinthians) how the poor and struggling Macedonian church begged to give and did so in an overwhelming way to help the Jerusalem



church. (Take time to read this passage and notice the words and phrases that describe their generosity).

- They gave beyond their means.
- They gave of their own free will. (Paul didn't even ask them; they heard and begged for the chance to help.)
- They gave out of a surrendered life (to God).

The "formula" for their giving confounds the ways of the world: Severe trial + extreme poverty = rich generosity. Wait a minute! That can't be right. Ah yes, the key ingredient has been left out: Severe trial + extreme poverty + overflowing joy = rich generosity. Now it's right!

Joy is the key for a generous life. But what is joy really? A concise definition is elusive for us. It is *not* happiness (which depends on circumstances). It is not simply a good feeling. The thread of joy through the scriptures reveals these key aspects. Joy is a deep sense of well-being rooted in:

1. Gratitude for God's gifts and faithfulness.
2. Assurance of one's (beloved) identity in Christ.
3. A sure and certain hope in God's promises.

Joy is something we must choose, especially when our circumstances are difficult. James challenges us to "consider it all joy when we encounter trials ..." (James 1:2)

The Macedonians, in the midst of their poverty and own trials, chose to have joy and begged for the chance to give. This is the spirit of generosity God has sown into our beings. This is the heart the Holy Spirit longs to awaken in us, and it is for our joy, our well-being, our fullness, and His great delight.

"God, we long to live generous lives. Like birds are made to fly, you have made us to be givers. Cultivate your giving heart in us, for your own glory and our great joy."