

“Core Values: Generosity”

2 Corinthians 9:6-15 • Exodus 35:4-10, 20-29

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • February 5, 2017

Today we are studying again our Core Values as a congregation and we've said we value *generosity*. We should begin by defining what we mean by generosity. Someone once said that we all would like to have the reputation of generosity and we'd all like to buy it cheap. In 1929, Henry Ford visited Ireland for the first time and was in the city where his parents had come from. While he was there some of the leaders of the city came to see him and said, "We're trying to build a hospital here and were wondering if you'd like to make a contribution, perhaps in honor of your parents." Ford said, "I'll contribute \$5,000. The next day the newspaper ran a story about it with the headline, "Henry Ford donates \$50,000 to Hospital." Needless to say Henry Ford was quite upset and went to see the men who had asked for the donation. They apologized and said they would have the newspaper run a correction the next day: "Henry Ford Reduces Donation by \$45,000." Ford decided that might not be the best publicity and so he agreed to give them the full \$50,000 under one condition. Over the entrance to the hospital he wanted an inscription that read, "I came among you and you took me in."

Henry Ford felt like he had been taken in. He ended up giving the full \$50,000 but it wasn't out of generosity. In a way it was coerced. So what IS generosity? The definition I like is "Unselfishness. Giving our sharing abundantly." In our core value of generosity we say, "We believe that we honor God by offering ourselves fully to Him. We recognize that everything we have – our money, time, and abilities – is a gift from God, entrusted to us to use generously for His glory. By giving and serving generously we are 'storing up treasures in heaven.'" The question is, does that describe you?

The Bible has a lot to say about generosity and today we're looking at just a couple of those passages. Jesus talked about money more than

he talked about any other subject. Of Jesus' thirty eight parables, twelve deal with the right or wrong use of money. One out of every six verses in Matthew, Mark, and Luke is on the subject of money. All throughout the Bible we find instructions from God on how we are to handle money in a way that glorifies Him.

There are basically two ways of looking at giving and serving. The first way could be called the world's way. This way says that money is simply math. I can count how much I earn and how much I spend and as long as I spend less than I earn then I have some left over to save or to give away. If I look at my money this way, then giving means I have less. If I have ten dollars and I give away one, that leaves me with nine dollars. If I have a hundred dollars and I give away ten, then that leaves me with ninety dollars. If I have a thousand dollars and I give away a hundred dollars, I'm left with nine hundred. But now a hundred dollars is a lot of money. I start to think of all the things I could do with a hundred dollars. Maybe I shouldn't give away this money. Maybe I can't afford to give away this money. If I give it away I might not have enough. So I grasp it tighter. Fear and anxiety begin to creep into my thoughts. And those are not fruits of the Spirit. The same thing applies to our time.

But there's another way of looking at your giving. Jesus said, "give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you." In today's passage from 2 Corinthians, Paul says, "whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." What if we realized that the money we have is not the real resource but it's merely the seeds and our giving to God is like planting seeds?

If you look at what the Bible says about money, you will discover that your money, your resources, actually belong to God. This begins

with creation. God created the whole universe and so He owns everything in it. Verse 10 of our Corinthians passage is clear about this. “He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food *will* supply and multiply your seed for sowing.” God has entrusted some of His resources to you with a purpose. So what is his purpose in blessing you with resources? This passage shows us two purposes. The first is in verse 10, to “increase the harvest of your righteousness.” To put it another way, you will grow to be more like Christ. One of God’s purposes with money is to give you an opportunity to grow in faith, to trust Him. Money is not really about money, it’s about trust. Who are you going to trust to provide—yourself or God?

The second reason God blesses you with resources is for you to bless others. In verse 8 Paul says, “God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.” When you are faithful with your money, God promises to provide everything you need. Notice it doesn’t say you will get everything you *want*. But you will get what you need with enough to be able to help others. Verse 11 says it this way: “You will be *enriched* in every way to be *generous* in every way.” That’s a bold claim. Somebody should do some research to see if it’s true.

Actually, somebody has. Christian Smith, a sociologist at Notre Dame, has done extensive research on the science of generosity. He studied 2,000 people to see how generosity affected other areas of life and he published the results in a book called, *The Paradox of Generosity*. What he found is that people who are generous with their money and time and relationships (any of that sound familiar?) are happier, healthier, and more resilient than their less generous counterparts. The people in the study who were generous were significantly less likely to experience depression or anxiety.

Not only that, but he discovered that people who were generous ended up better off financially. “By grasping onto what we currently

have,” Smith writes, “we lose out on better goods that we might have gained. In holding onto what we possess, we diminish its long-term value to us. By always protecting ourselves against future uncertainties and misfortunes, we are affected in ways that make us more anxious about uncertainties and vulnerable to future misfortunes. In short, by failing to care for others, we do not properly take care of ourselves.”

Why is that? Smith says, “Practicing generosity requires and reinforces the perception of living in a world of abundance and blessing, which itself also increases happiness and health.” It turns out that the reality of the universe is that whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.” Give and it will be given to you. God is serious about your giving. In fact, it’s the only time He ever says, “test me.” In Malachi 3 God says, “Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.” It’s like God’s saying, “90% of your income with my blessing is way more than 100% of your income without my blessing.”

As we look at our passage from Exodus 35 we find several important principles about giving and serving. Verses 4 and 5 say, “This is the thing that the LORD has *commanded*. Take from among you a contribution to the LORD.” God doesn’t really consider giving to be optional. He expects you to be generous because it already belongs to Him. When you think about giving money or serving are you thinking about what it will cost you or are you thinking about how to faithfully manage what God has entrusted to you?

Second, verse 5 says, “Whoever is of a generous heart, let him bring the LORD’s contribution.” Then in verse 21, “And they came, everyone whose heart stirred him, and everyone whose spirit moved him, and brought

the LORD's contribution." Verse 22 mentions "All who were of a willing heart," and verse 26 says, "All the women whose hearts stirred them to use their skill..." Giving and serving are matters of the heart. Some people might give or serve out of a sense of guilt or obligation but God wants you to give and serve for the joy of it. When you are generous because God stirred your heart you will find tremendous satisfaction and will discover that you can't outgive God. Notice that in this passage giving and serving generously are mentioned equally and interchangeably. From God's perspective, when you offer yourself sacrificially to Him, there's no difference between your money, your time, and your abilities. What matters is your commitment to the work of His Kingdom.

Finally, there's one more area where we are called to be generous – in our relationships.

God is very generous with you. Besides the time and skills He has given you, besides the financial blessings He has sent your way, the most important place we see God's generosity is in His grace toward us. In spite of our sin, God loves and forgives us in Jesus. So you and I should be just as generous with one another. You should show grace to others generously, forgiving people the way God has forgiven you.

Let me leave you with this thought. For many years, J.L. Kraft, the head of Kraft Foods, gave over 25% of his large fortune to Christian causes. Late in life he said, "The only investment I ever made which has paid consistently increasing dividends is the money I have given to the Lord." I pray that your generosity will overflow in many thanksgivings to God.

Amen.