

## **Marks of A Thriving Church: Generosity**

**Introduction:** According to *The Giving Report 2022* published by Canada Helps the percentage of Canadian charitable donors has noticeably decreased and the decline in generosity is already happening pre-pandemic.<sup>1</sup>

But not so here at Cornerstone; and allow me to share small samples of what we have done so far this year because of your generosity:

### **Street Outreach:**

Over 1800 sandwiches, 1200 baked goods, and 350 meals handed out downtown.

### **Pantry:**

Giving out on average 30 boxes/month;  
also providing support to several refugee families in the Markham area.

### **Community Care:**

40 deliveries with our Grocery and Driver team;

Continue support for Jonas and his family – the GoFundMe campaign raised over \$47,000 to support Jonas schooling and assist in bringing his family to Canada;

We have provided support to the Markham Stouffville Crisis Pregnancy Centre by

delivering essential supplies to families,

packing bloom boxes for families with new babies,

and covering the cost of their online platform so they can continue to reach families.

Through the Prison Fellowship of Canada's Angel Tree Camp program, we sponsored ten children to attend summer camp this year!

### **Global Mission:**

Close to **\$50k** in donation for various ministry and construction projects in Verbo Church, Bluefields, Nicaragua, Roatan Alive Missions, Honduras,

**121 active sponsorships** with Compassion Canada.

Let's encourage each other and praise our Heavenly Father for His work in and through your generosity! We thank God that Cornerstone has bucked the generosity trend in Canada, but let's not be complacent because ...

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.canadahelps.org/en/the-giving-report/>  
<https://www.fraserinstitute.org/article/charitable-giving-on-the-wane-in-canada>  
Check out data from Stats Can:  
<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220412/dq220412d-eng.htm>  
<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1110013001>

- Every day we face many forces trying to stop us from being generous.
- Martin Luther has certainly made an important point when he said, “There are three conversions necessary: the conversion of the heart, mind, and ***the purse.***”
- Generosity is a matter of heart, a discipleship and spiritual maturity issue.
- As of this morning Cornerstone’s general donation is \$175,803.91 behind 2022 Budget.

Generosity is one of Cornerstone’s Core Values: We’re called to be extravagantly generous because God has been extravagantly generous to us in Jesus. – [2 Corinthians 8:7-9](#)

We’re continuing in our series called Marks of a Thriving Church.<sup>2</sup> The series is based on Acts 2:42-47 and we are looking at the theme of “Radical Generosity” this morning:

Acts 2:42 They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to ***fellowship***, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.<sup>43</sup> Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.<sup>44</sup> **All the believers were together and had everything in common.**<sup>45</sup> **They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.**<sup>46</sup> Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. **They broke bread in their**

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<sup>2</sup> “Cultivate Generosity” is included in Carey Nieuwhof’s *The Thriving church Checklist*.

**homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,**<sup>47</sup> praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Luke gives a fuller picture of what’s going on in the Jerusalem church in Acts 4:

4:32 **All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.**<sup>33</sup> With **great power** the apostles continued to testify to **the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.** And **God’s grace was so powerfully at work** in them all<sup>34</sup> that **there were no needy persons among them.** For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales<sup>35</sup> and put it at the apostles’ feet, and **it was distributed to anyone who had need.**

So we see here and in the other passages in Acts that radical generosity is not a political or economic system<sup>3</sup> but

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<sup>3</sup> In contrast to communism the selling and sharing of properties is voluntary based on a caring response to needs, instead of political, socio-economic legislation or renunciation of all private property; what’s been sold is discretionary and “extra” – private ownership remains in the church. We must also remember the unique historical context of thousands of Jewish pilgrims who came to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem, responded to Peter’s preaching and became Christ-followers

Christ-followers practicing God's extravagant love in the name of Jesus, by the power of the Spirit.<sup>4</sup>

This radical generosity is ...

- Generated by God's rescuing grace and resurrection power,
- Demonstrated in self-giving and life-enriching acts, and
- Used by the Spirit to draw people closer to Jesus.

We will look at THREE practical deliberations of this radical generosity.

### 1. Being responsive and responsible to steward resources to meet individual needs, wisely.

Luke uses specific descriptive terms and phrases that convey similar impression which is pregnant with practical implications:

- ✓ ***“devoted themselves to fellowship [κοινωνία]”***
- ✓ ***“all the believers were together and had everything in common ... ate together with glad and sincere hearts,”***
- ✓ ***“all the believers were one in heart and mind,”***
- ✓ ***“they shared everything they had.”***

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<sup>4</sup> The gift and enabling of the Holy Spirit leads to inspired preaching, Christian/intimate fellowship, and generosity (Acts 4:31; I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, p. 108; Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, p.334.).

In the Jerusalem church context all these indicate the depth of a worshipping community and its compassion:

- “devoted to fellowship” means intentionally cultivating relational closeness and persistently providing material support,
- genuine corporate gathering or worship includes collective participation, partnership, planning to give – church unity and all-of-life spirituality [i.e., ***no compartmentalization of spirituality and giving material support to the needy***],
- a generous and continuous pooling of material contribution, wisely stewarding resources “2:45 to give to anyone who had need ... 4:34 that there were no needy persons among them.” [cf. Acts 6:1-7].

Seeing the needs of the community, the Jesus-followers showed commitment to God and one another in His family rose to the occasion; and, having tasted the abundant richness of God's rescuing grace and sacrificial love in Jesus, they operated from a grateful spirit and an abundant mindset, instead of a scarcity mindset.

### 2. Examine the Heart of Giving: What possesses us is more revealing than what we possess.

In Acts 4:36 – 5:1-10 Luke provides the contrast between Barnabas [as one godly, compassionate, and generous

example] and Ananias & Sapphira [as examples of improper use of possessions, i.e., their pride, deceit, and love of money]. The lesson is clear:

***God looks at the condition of the giver's heart, not the cash one gives.***

Here are the different perspectives on how we might consider our possession:

- *Everything is mine; I'll keep whatever is mine.*
- *Everything is give-and-take; I'll negotiate and compromise.*
- *Everything is God's gift; I'll take whatever I can.*
- *Everything is God-owned; I'll be a good steward.*

***Stewardship is the act of organizing your life so God can spend you.***

Lynn Miller

It's instructive to see the background and significance of Pentecost as this relates to giving and generosity.<sup>5</sup>

Pentecost, 50 days after the Passover, is a pilgrimage festival that the Jewish people bring their first fruit as

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<sup>5</sup> [https://www.logos.com/grow/pentecost-in-the-bible/?campaignid=18467614046&adgroupid=142254628985&keyword=&device=c&utm\\_source=google&utm\\_medium=advertising\\_cpc&utm\\_campaign=google\\_search-keyword\\_dsa\\_logos\\_ca\\_en&gclid=Cj0KCQiA37KbBhDgARIsAlzce15RiTAbczuVtXXJfJGmjLbW4LzfzWOQGtVK8HCAVmS5yUZRJ7hPkAaAsZOEALw\\_wcB](https://www.logos.com/grow/pentecost-in-the-bible/?campaignid=18467614046&adgroupid=142254628985&keyword=&device=c&utm_source=google&utm_medium=advertising_cpc&utm_campaign=google_search-keyword_dsa_logos_ca_en&gclid=Cj0KCQiA37KbBhDgARIsAlzce15RiTAbczuVtXXJfJGmjLbW4LzfzWOQGtVK8HCAVmS5yUZRJ7hPkAaAsZOEALw_wcB)

offering to God, as a sign of gratitude – acknowledging that their life was depended entirely upon God for their material prosperity.<sup>6</sup>

Our giving expresses our gratitude for God's multiple blessing in our lives; it's an integral part of our worship.

***Grace and gratitude belong together like heaven and earth. Grace evokes gratitude like the voice an echo. Gratitude follows grace as thunder follows lighting.***

Karl Barth

At this moment it might be appropriate for all of us to **pause and consider all the valuable/lasting gifts or "blessing" we received from God.**

If we were to give each item a price tag, what would be the **total value** of all the blessings and how **much does it cost God?**

Pentecost is also a reminder of the Exodus story, when God led His people out of Egypt and into the Promise Land. On the 50<sup>th</sup> day after the Israelites left Egypt, they arrived at Mt. Sinai where the Lord gave the Ten Commandments, instructions about the way of life by which they should now carry out His purposes.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Ex. 23:14-17; Lev. 23:16-17; Num. 28:26.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Deut. 4:10-13.

Someone once said, “People give because of who they are.”<sup>8</sup> The early church knows who they are, i.e., God’s redeemed, Spirit-empowered, grateful people who proclaim the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and embody the extravagant grace of the Father!

Like what and how the Israelites celebrated the festival of Pentecost, Jesus-followers breathe the air of generosity; grace and gratitude is their self-giving force.

God-honouring and life-enriching generosity is not done out of obligation but an open, grateful and surrendered heart to carry out God’s world restoring purposes.

### **3. Commit to be a generous church on mission; being a generous people embodying the gospel.**

Acts 2:42 They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to ***fellowship***, to the breaking of bread and to prayer ...<sup>47</sup> praising God and ***enjoying the favor of all the people***. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved ...<sup>4:33</sup> With ***great power*** the apostles continued to testify to ***the resurrection of the Lord Jesus***. And ***God’s grace was so powerfully at work*** in them all<sup>34</sup> that ***there were no needy persons among them***.

This picture of the Jerusalem church suggests that, as the result of the outpouring of the Spirit and power to change,

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<sup>8</sup> Barna Group, *The Giving Landscape*, p. 20.

the presence of the church is vibrant and attractive, the joy of God’s people infectious.

***Community life is never an end in itself; a vibrant community is a community in mission.***

*Ajith Fernando*<sup>9</sup>

**Everyone gains by giving because fulfilling God’s mission trumps hoarding; generosity opens doors to greater gospel influence.**

The people/neighbours give “favour” – grace, blessing, thanks, gift, kindness, goodwill - to God’s people because His grace is powerfully at work in His people.<sup>10</sup>

Radical generosity demonstrates the life-changing power of God and it’s attractive to outsiders and brings positive social influence, hospitality, hope, and healing.

[Cf. Our first free car wash serving cold drinks and hot dogs got this guy calling the newspaper; a young couple’s participation and later leading them to Christ.]

Our radical generosity declares and demonstrates to the watching world that we ***value people over possessions***.

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<sup>9</sup> Ajith Fernando, NIV Application Commentary, *Acts*, p. 179.

<sup>10</sup> Darrell I. Bock, *Acts*, p.155: “there is an important connection between community life and the ‘favor’ the community experience with outsiders ... the believers’ preaching was matched by their community, making a powerful testimony for their mission. When the early church said that God cared, the care they gave their own demonstrated this.”

**Conclusion:** The legacy my dad passed on to us is this,

**“Trust and obey, grace overflowing, life so blessed.”**

**Grace, generosity, and giving** are the characteristics I see in my dad’s life; and I hope I have passed on the same legacy to my children.

Every faith-filled giving transforms our otherwise *ordinary relationship with God* into an *extraordinary adventure*.

Every act of obedience *enlarges* our capacity to experience *more* of God’s life-changing power.