

Sermon – Generosity Ignited
Sunday October 29, 2023

When God's people give generously, anything is possible.

I'm supposed to preach on Generosity right now but after that video, I feel like you don't need a sermon on generosity, you guys are already living it out.

Through this amazing story of walking with Jonas, our community has been so generous. You've been generous with your time, your talent and your treasure and without your generosity none of this would be possible. So thank you.

Can we take a moment to praise God and celebrate!

Now, we don't want to rest on our laurels because we want to continue to bless more people in Jesus' name. We want to continue to make a kingdom impact for him. Amen?

When you think about it, doesn't it blow your mind that God could use the generosity of a local church in Markham whose mission is to Make Space for Jesus, to help a refugee from Cameroon reunite with his family and get a fresh start in Canada. How good is our God!

It's really an incredible story, but do you know it started? It started with a *Hello*. Do you know how after service we encourage you to say hi to someone you don't know? Well, that's how Don struck up a conversation with Jonas who was visiting for the first time.

But then Don sensed that that the Spirit was prompting him to take Jonas out for lunch. So he did that. After that Don sensed that the Spirit was prompting him to take Jonas out to buy some groceries. So he did that too.

During this time, Don felt like God was putting a burden on his heart for Jonas. So he shared this with Leona. They both sensed that the Spirit was prompting them to bring Jonas to the Christmas Eve service and then invite him back home for Christmas dinner afterwards. So they did that too.

One thing led to another. They would invite Jonas to stay with them. The church would come alongside to provide support. And different people in the congregation would step up to give their time, expertise and support.

You see, this incredible story didn't start with big ambitions to make a difference. It started with a simple *Hello*. It started with one man who was open to the needs of the person God had placed in front of him. And then being obedient to what the Spirit was prompting him to do next.

That's what generosity is about. Being open and being obedient.

How can we be open to the needs of the people in our lives? How can we be obedient when the Spirit prompts us?

Today we're wrapping up our series called *A Church that Prays*. We've been studying the book of Acts and looking at how the early church prayed.

We've been saying, the church grew because it prayed and it prayed because it grew. Prayer was a key to the growth of the church. But as the church grew, more people came. And with all these new people, more needs emerged.

How would the church respond to these needs? With generosity! As a result, needs were met, community flourished and the church continued to grow.

Today we're talking about generosity. And instead of looking at one main Bible passage, we're going to look at two. It's a 2 for 1 deal. I'll explain why in a moment - but the passages we're going to look at are in Acts chapter 2 and chapter 4.

The first passage is from Acts 2:42-47

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)

The second passage is from Acts 4:32-35

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. ³³ 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 ³⁴ 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 ³⁵ and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. (Acts 4:32-35)

Now why are we looking at these two passages? Because they're key passages in Acts that describe the early church.

They both take place right after the church prays.

- Right before the Acts 2 passage, the church is praying and then the Holy Spirit comes at Pentecost for the first time.
- Right before the Acts 4 passage, again the church is praying and the church is filled again with the Holy Spirit.

Because the Holy Spirit has just come upon the church, these passages show us what a Spirit-filled community looks like. There are many great characteristics we could look at but today we're going to focus on how a Spirit-filled Community is Generous in their Giving.

All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. (2:44-45)

No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. ... 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 ³⁵ and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. (4:32, 34)

How can we be a church that's Generous in our Giving? How can we be open to the people and the needs around us? How can we be obedient to what the Spirit is prompting us to do?

What I want to do today is look at these passages and talk about the Attitude of Generosity, the Action of Generosity and the Impact of Generosity.

First, the **Attitude of Generosity**

Generosity starts first with our attitude. What's your attitude towards your possessions? Do you see yourself as the Owner or a Steward? What's the difference?

An owner has rights but a steward has a responsibility. An owner has the right to use their resources however they want because it's theirs.

But if you're a steward, you can't do that. Why? Because it doesn't belong to you. It belongs to the owner. And your job is to manage the resources you've been entrusted with not according to what you want to do with it, but according to what the owner wants.

So who's the owner? God is.

**for every animal of the forest is mine,
and the cattle on a thousand hills.**

**¹¹ I know every bird in the mountains,
and the insects in the fields are mine.**

**¹² If I were hungry I would not tell you,
for the world is mine, and all that is in it. (Psalm 50:10-12)**

God is the owner of everything and we are his stewards. In Genesis 1, God gives people the responsibility to take care of the earth. Their job is to manage his resources according to his good purposes.

So let's go back to Acts. Why was the early church so generous with their possessions? Was it because they saw themselves as the owner or as stewards?

All the believers were together and had everything in common. (2:44)

No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. (4:32)

The early church saw themselves as stewards. They believed their possessions belonged to God and they understood that they had a responsibility to share them. In other words, **They stewarded their resources for the good of others.**

In the book of Acts, the Greek word *koinonia* is often used to describe community in the early church. *Koinonia* literally means to share or to have in common.

Here in these passages, we see the church sharing with each other. They share their meals, their lives and their faith in Jesus. But there's also something else they share— their possessions.

You see, *koinonia* speaks to how they see themselves as part of a community. They depend on each other, they belong to each other, they need each other.

Generosity starts with knowing you're a steward. You're responsible to manage your resources for the good of others.

Does this mean you can't enjoy your resources yourself? Of course not. God wants you to enjoy his gifts. But he also wants you to remember that everything comes from him and belongs to him. He blesses you so that you can bless others with those blessings.

Second, this Attitude of Generosity leads to the **Action of Generosity.**

When the early church became aware of needs in their community they realized they didn't have the money to give so what did they do?

They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. (2:45)

For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵ and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. (4:34)

Selling their property and possessions would mean a major change to their finances and lifestyle. They would lose their comfort and security. But they still gave. And **They gave sacrificially.**

Giving what we can afford to give isn't hard to do. But what could possibly motivate us to give sacrificially?

There are different reasons to give.

- We can give out of pride. We can give because we want others to think we're generous.
- We can give out of obligation. We can give because we feel like we should be doing it.
- We can give out of guilt. We can give because we'll feel bad if we don't.

But here's the problem. None of these things can motivate us to give sacrificially. There's only one thing that can. Love.

This shouldn't come as a surprise because after all love by definition is sacrificial. When you love someone, you don't do things for your own benefit or to satisfy your own needs. Love is selfless and puts others first.

Where do we see the greatest expression of this? On the cross. Paul writes:

God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

Love is costly. It always requires sacrifice.

Just think, you have no problem being generous to the people you love.

- You have no problem spending money on your kids' programs and education.
- You have no problem buying gifts for your spouse.
- You have no problem spending money on yourself.

It's not hard to be generous with yourself or your family, but how can you be generous with others?

There's only one way you can do it. You think about God's love. You think about how God has been generous to you.

- God loved you so much, he didn't spare his own son, but gave him up for you.
- Jesus loved you so much, that he laid aside his wealth for you. Though he was rich, he became poor so that through his poverty you could be rich.
- Jesus loved you so much that he lost everything. On the cross, he lost his friends, his dignity, his father and even his own life.

What motivated Jesus to sacrifice everything? His love for you.

There's a quote by Ann Voskamp that I've shared before but I think it's worth sharing again.

Surplus giving is the leftover you can afford to give. Sacrificial giving is the love gift that changes how you live because the love of Christ has changed you. God doesn't want your leftovers. God wants your "first-overs" because He is your first love." (Ann Voskamp)

This Fall, my oldest daughter Abby started a new part-time job and she's making some decent money for a student. When our kids were young, they learned to give their tithes to the church. They would put 10 percent of their allowance or birthday money and put it into their offering.

Now that Abby has this new job, a few weeks ago, on her own initiative, she went online to Cornerstone's Give page. She wanted to set-up a recurring donation for her tithe. Then she

calculated how much she would give. When she saw the amount, she was taken aback. That's a lot of money! Do Christians really give that much?

That's when she realized this isn't giving our leftovers; it's sacrificial giving. It's giving that changes how you live.

I imagine that in that moment she was thinking about all the things she could do with that money. Go out with her friends, save up for school, buy lots of bubble tea.

Then we talked about how everything belongs to God and giving 10 percent is a way of acknowledging that. It's a way of putting God first and trusting in him to provide. It supports the work of the local church and it reminds us that we're stewards who are called to give generously and sacrificially.

If you're a Christian and you consider Cornerstone your church but you're not a regular giver yet, I want to challenge you to give.

<https://cornerstonechurch.ca/give>

The tithe has been the biblical benchmark for Christians. You might start by giving 10 percent of your income. Or you might start by giving 3 or 4 percent and then work your way up. Just remember, it's not your money God wants, it's your heart.

If you don't give, God doesn't love you any less. But as you give, you'll grow in your joy, you'll grow in your freedom and you'll grow more and more like Jesus who said that it's more blessed to give than to receive.

Finally, our Action of Generosity leads to the **Impact of Generosity**.

What was the impact of generosity in the church?

Acts 4:34 says **there were no needy persons among them. (4:34)**

The early believers were taking care of each other. They were selling their possessions to meet needs.

But this verse doesn't just describe what the early church was doing; it describes who the early church wanted to be. You see, this verse is a reference to Deuteronomy 15.

...there need be no poor people among you, for in the land the LORD your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, he will richly bless you (Deuteronomy 15:4)

What's Deuteronomy 15 about? Deuteronomy 15 is about the Year of Jubilee. How many of you have heard of the Jubilee? How often is it celebrated? The Jubilee is a special event that's celebrated every 50 years. It's the year when:

- the land and the people rest,
- slaves are set free

- the poor are released from their debts
- God's people are encouraged to give generously so that the poor can have a fresh start.

Jubilee is about justice and flourishing. God designed it so that the poor wouldn't be crushed by their poverty.

So why does the writer Luke connect the church's giving to the Year of Jubilee? He's making a point. He's saying that the Holy Spirit is doing some new; he's creating a new community. You don't need to wait every 50 years to be radically generous. You can do it now. You can share your power and give sacrificially whenever you see a need.

We are to be this community marked by generosity and justice. We are to share our possessions, use our resources for the poor and leverage our privilege to benefit others.

And what impact do you think this kind of community will have in the world? It will make people curious. Because

- People normally don't sell their possessions to give to the poor,
- People normally don't tithe their income,
- People normally don't give sacrificially to others.

So why are these people so generous? What makes them love so well? I don't know, but I definitely want to find out.

And that's exactly what happened. **They attracted others through their generous lifestyle.**

People flocked to them and joined this community. And as a result, the church grew.

And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (2:47)

The impact of the church's generosity isn't just that they met needs. The impact of the church's generosity is also that they put God's generosity and justice on display and became a powerful witness to the world.

- So when we have an Attitude of Generosity and we steward our resources for the good of others.
- When we take the Action of Generosity and we give sacrificially.
- We make an Impact of Generosity. We attract others through our witness and people see through us, the generous love and justice of our Heavenly Father.