

Old School: Generosity, 5/3/20

The next Old School Spiritual Practice that God has given for his people to thrive during both times of prosperity and crisis: **Generosity**. I know what you are thinking, “Really Nate? A message on money and giving at a time like this?” I mean people get uncomfortable when preachers talk about money in stable times, let alone a financial crisis! Maybe that seems tone deaf at best and greedy at worst in light of Covid-19. Stock Markets have plunged, America’s GDP is projected to drop between 20-30% in the second quarter. Unemployment is almost twice what it was during the Great Recession, many have lost entire businesses and are racked with debt. Why are we talking about giving at a time like this?

#1 To speak God’s Word into your pressing financial decisions. This is an incredibly relevant topic right now and there are at least three financial categories of people watching this message. **Stable and Prospering:** Some of us have been mostly unaffected financially by this crisis, some are actually prospering right now, receiving extra money from stimulus... And you are asking, “What does generosity look like in a time of crisis?” **Staying Afloat:** Those whose income or future income is uncertain, you may be one bad quarter away from crisis, maybe you are experiencing temporary unemployment or you just don’t know if you can count on the same paycheck going forward. “Should I give in times of uncertainty?” **Financial Crisis:** Those who are really struggling right now. You didn’t have financial stability before this happened and now you feel like you are drowning. And you are wondering, “How am I going to meet my immediate needs in this crisis?” This message is going to address all three categories of people watching today.

#2 Jesus would preach on money and generosity right now. Jesus actually spoke about money more than anyone else in Scripture and his audience was both the wealthy and the poor. Jesus spoke to the relevant issues of the day, even when it was awkward or taken offensively because he was always preaching to the heart. Listen, money is always connected to the heart- where your treasure is so your heart will be also. A time of economic uncertainty and crisis reveals where our treasure really is. See money is like fire. Is fire good or bad? Well that depends where it is. It’s good if it’s in a furnace, bad if it’s on your rug. Money can either be incredibly life-giving or it can be destructive. Life-giving when we are good stewards and generous, destructive when it becomes our identity, source of life and we hoard it.

Seven Principles of Generosity from 2 Corinthians 8:1-9

¹And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches.

#1 Generosity is By God’s Grace. This amazing testimony of generosity among the Macedonian churches we are about to hear can only be attributed to the grace of God. True financial generosity has at its roots not guilt but grace. Guilt will never motivate true generosity, only grace can do that. A belief that God has been so gracious, so generous to us in Jesus that we are

motivated by that grace to give generously. Your generosity will never outpace God's grace toward you in Christ, do you know that grace?

² *In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.*

#2 Generosity in crisis marks authentic Christianity. These Macedonian churches were in the midst of a severe trial that left them in extreme poverty. There was no rainy-day fund that they could tap into. What that trial is we don't know, but this wasn't uncommon for the early church. In fact, the church was born into immediate financial crisis. Most Christians were poor, and many were being persecuted for their new faith, losing property, losing their position in the community and financial opportunity. In the book of Acts, we see members of the early church selling property to help with the severe needs and arranging to distribute food to the poorest among them. These passages are not describing the behavior of a prosperous and comfortable church with large benefactors but a persecuted minority banding together in common generosity toward one another. Generosity was a defining mark of the early church. Generosity isn't reserved for times of financial prosperity. In fact, the opposite was true for this Macedonian church, their faith shined brightest when it was tested in the fires of crisis.

What we do with our resources during a time of crisis and uncertainty may be one of the greatest marks of authentic faith. Just as Abraham trusted God by putting his greatest treasure, his son Issac, in God's hands, so too God tests our faith sometimes through uncertainty, instability, lack of excess and he's asking, "Will you put your finances in my hands?"

² *In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.*

#3 Generosity is an overflow of joy not resources. Paul intentionally contrasts the riches of their joy with the extreme lack of riches of their resources. If you have had the privilege of visiting the church in a third world context you have likely had a Macedonian church experience. You have seen up close the correlation between joy and generosity, in spite of the fact that there is little. I was on a missions trip in Guatemala visiting a pastor who ministers to people who work on a **garbage dump**, salvaging metal. And there is a small church there full of life, even though they spend grueling days working in these awful conditions. What struck me was a group of **Christian women** who made little necklaces from the scraps of the garbage dump and their proceeds were going to feed others who had even less than they did. And they were filled with joy knowing that the children of this village would not starve to death because of what they were providing. **Slide** Joy doesn't come from our circumstances and an abundance of resources. One of the greatest things that could happen in this crisis is for God to help us see the source of true joy, our relationship with God.

³ *For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability.*

#4 Generosity is sometimes Risky. These believers gave beyond their means. Conventional wisdom would say recklessly. In my former life as an advisor, I would have said “Don’t do this!” They gave like the widow with two coins. Now, this isn’t necessarily prescriptive...Paul is not telling us we have to forego food in order to be generous. In fact, Paul tells the church in Corinth just a few verses later in 11-12 that they should give according to their means. But I will ask, do you think the Macedonians Christians regretted their risky generosity? Do you think they are in eternity kicking themselves and saying...we should have held back, that was foolish. No, I think they remember the words of Jesus when he said to seek first the kingdom of God and all these things (their needs) will be added to you. I think each of us should take in what that means for us in our unique circumstance.

^{3b}Entirely on their own, ⁴ they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord’s people. ⁵ And they exceeded our expectations.

#5 Generosity is Voluntary. No one used guilt tactics, made them feel bad, held anything over them. No coercion, Paul seems to say that he may have tried to tell them not to give so much because of their poverty but they weren’t going to be persuaded. “Paul you are not going to rob us from the joy of helping the church in Jerusalem during this famine.” True generosity comes from the heart, freewill. God loves a cheerful giver.

⁵They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us.

#6 Generosity is Worship. The church in Jerusalem wasn’t first. They didn’t do this in order to impress or win the affection of Paul, or so that they could get something in return. We are a little jaded sometimes because we suspect there are many people and corporations that give for the wrong reasons...because of the accolades and press they can get, or so that they can hold leverage in a political party. That wasn’t the case here, no deal made- OK you give this amount and we will put your name on the plaque in the front of the Jerusalem church. Ironically, little did they know their generosity would be the shining example in the pages of Scripture forever. It came from their love of God and then overflowed into their love for one another. It was worship. Godward generosity is the only kind of generosity that can protect us from impure motives of giving. Giving to control others, to have influence, to feel better about yourself or others. The Macedonians gave in response to generosity of Jesus Christ toward them.

The last principle comes at the conclusion of Paul’s words about giving.

2 Corinthians 9:12-15

¹² This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.

¹³ Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.

¹⁴ And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. ¹⁵ Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

#7 Generosity has an Incredible Ripple Effect. It results in meeting needs, thanksgiving to God, joy, a testimony of the Gospel to others who witness generosity, and increased prayer. Hoarding our resources is the opposite of a ripple effect, it's like a drain, in just sucks everything in. What kind of ripple effects do you want your generosity to have? Some of those ripples you won't experience until you see them on the shores of heaven.

I have witnessed the ripple effect of generosity through the many generous people that I have had the privilege to know in my life. One story that is close to home I'd like to share to inspire you. My parents were going through a particularly difficult season of life where it just seemed from a human standpoint that they couldn't catch a break. My parents were going through an emotionally, relationally and financially difficult ministry transition leaving a church he had pastored for many years before he felt he was ready. They were worn down. Questioning their calling. And there was not a clear path for what was next and very little financial security. And then my dad got into a nearly fatal car accident, getting t-boned by another car. Not only was his car totaled but he was in the hospital with a collapsed lung, broken leg, broken ribs and just a lot of pain. Many of you were praying for that over a year ago and we are so thankful for your prayers. It just felt like maybe God didn't see them and their pain, you ever have that feeling? You know it's not true, but it's just how you feel in the moment. And we were all praying as a family and seeking the Lord. Meanwhile, God was at work behind the scenes. Out of nowhere, and completely unforeseen and unsolicited another Christian gave them a generous financial gift. And said to my parents, "This isn't from me, this is from the Lord and it is his way of telling you that he sees you and loves you and hasn't abandoned you." I asked my dad to recount what he felt like in that moment he said, "When I saw the gracious gift that the Lord gave through a loving believer, I broke down and cried my eyes out, praising the Lord for his love and graciousness to Linda and me. These verses came to mind from Ephesians 3:20-21 "Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory." There greatest joy is to see how God has continued to get all the glory. When this happens to you personally, 2 Corinthians 8-9 leap off the page- see this isn't theory, this is what actually happens. An overflow of thanksgiving to God and it has inspired me and my whole family to be more radically generous.

My goal today is not to guilt you but inspire you! Would you be so bold as to ask God to show you- "What does radical, God-glorifying, grace-inspired, joyful generosity look like during a crisis?" What if we saw this text not as a hypothetical scenario or story of some unique situation in "early church" days, but as models for actual behavior of churches whenever a crisis hits? Health officials mandating social distancing and quarantine to "flatten the curve" of the outbreak. In the same way, what if the church can work to flatten the curve of the virus's economic effects locally? Are we prepared to leverage assets to help with the needs? The virus has required us to change our social behaviors for the sake of the most vulnerable among us. What if we were willing to change our financial behaviors for the sake of the most vulnerable in need? What might God be calling you to sacrifice? To forego? To give up for a time? That could

be something as simple as cutting out snacks or ordering out in order to give. Or it could be something significant like selling or free up assets to care for those in need. Where would I give? Pay attention to where the Spirit might call you to be generous.

- Your family members
- Your spiritual family- the church (general budget)
- Love-in-Action Fund
- Love Your Neighbor- Brandywine.church/loveneighbor
- Community (local/global)

Let me speak to those who are in crisis right now- Are you reaching out for help like the church in Jerusalem did? This is a time when we need each other. We bear one another's burdens in love. Love-In-Action Fund to help with these needs among us. Contact Lanny Weaver- lanny.weaver@brandywine.church. Even if you are in a severe trial financially, don't assume you have nothing to give. You may have other resources that you use to serve others. I know of a woman who has very little she can give financially but she calls shut-ins, sends them notes, she makes masks for people to go out, she drives to get people groceries. Would you take your 5 loaves and 2 fish, however small or insignificant you think your resources are, in the hands of the one who can multiply them?

Ultimately, what inspires generosity as a Christian? The gospel!

⁹ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

Pray,

Facebook Live Monday 10am