

Generosity

Introduction

In the West we usually associate the word 'generosity' with liberal financial giving, because money and materialism are a large part of our culture. But generosity can also mean freely sharing food, resources, time, support, etc.

More blessed to give than receive

Jesus said that it's more blessed to give than to receive. The more we realise how blessed we are and that we're called to be a blessing to others, the greater the challenge to be generous. In light of all that we've received from God, how can we be miserly and hold on tight to what we have?

If we're honest, however, most of us find being generous easier to aspire to than to live up to. But if we want generosity to be a value in our lives we need to allow the Spirit of God to expand and stretch us.

Freely you have received, freely give

We've freely received so much from God – salvation, grace and favour, mercy, forgiveness – the list goes on. As our love for him grows in response to his amazing generosity towards us, it should be natural for us to freely give the fruits of that grace to others. There are so many ways to be generous, for example, we can be generous in sharing the good news; healing the sick; delivering the oppressed and depressed; honouring, complimenting and encouraging; showing compassion and kindness; extending forgiveness and grace; serving and giving of our time; preferring others and wanting them to succeed; giving of our material wealth, finances and resources; and much, much more.

Principle of generosity

Love your enemies, do good to them and lend to them without expecting to get anything back (Luke 6:35)

Love the Lord your God with all your heart . . . and love your neighbour as yourself (Matt 22: 37, 39)

If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink (Rom 12:20)

These scriptures indicate that we're called to be a blessing, not only to our neighbours but also to our enemies. Generosity is a part of this.

Extreme generosity

Jesus commended the widow who gave the little she had to God sacrificially, as opposed to the rich people for whom giving a lot cost very little. This incident, mentioned in Mark 12:41-44, shows us the right heart attitude, the right priorities and the widow's incredible generosity towards God.

Sowing and reaping

A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life (Gal 6:7-8).

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor 9:6-7).

Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For the measure you use, it will be measured to you (Luke 6:38).

Scripture shows us that what we sow plays a big part in what we reap. We can't expect to sow dishonour and reap honour, sow anger and reap peace, sow nothing and reap a harvest. If we're not reaping the harvest we desire to, it's worth looking at what we're sowing! 2 Corinthians 9:10 goes on to say that God gives seed to the sower and bread for food. We need to discover what the seed is that God has given us to generously sow, so we reap the harvest he wants us to.

Money

God is not opposed to us owning things but to things owning us. It's the 'love of money' that is the root of all kinds of evil (1 Tim 6:10). In the wrong hands money fosters greed, selfish ambition and encourages all kinds of addictions. But in the right hands it can be used to bring blessing, life, hope, freedom, and so on. True riches are not lots of money – they're defined by seeing thousands healed, releasing prophetic words, marriages restored, breakthroughs in situations, deliverance from torment, and so much else. So, if we want more money, do we want it to improve our standard of living – or do we want to be in a better position to bless more people?

Tithing

We believe financial giving to God's work is an important principle and financially supporting the Christian community we're part of is important too. Giving a tithe, or 10% of one's income, back to God, originated in God's command to Moses and the Israelites, and many local churches suggest a tithe of our income as a recommended guideline. When we read the gospels, however, we see that Jesus brought a much more challenging call to generosity, deeply questioning our heart motivation. The widow's offering, mentioned above, is one example.

Needs and blessings

Generosity can be a response to a need or a desire to bless. There are different kinds of giving and it's important to understand that what and where we give reaps different kinds of harvest. Giving to the poor will reap one kind of harvest, whereas sowing into a ministry will reap another, and blessing someone simply because we value them will reap yet another.

Our vision

Here at Immanuel we desire to be a community of Christians known for extravagant giving, as we're led by the Holy Spirit. We see having generous hearts as a key in releasing a harvest in many different ways – salvations, healing, lives set free, finances released, revival outpoured, and so on. For example, we're looking to see signs of prosperity in our local area, indicated by businesses thriving, shops opening, the homeless housed and the hungry fed! So we're sowing into the famine we perceive around us in as many ways as we can. Bill Johnson of Bethel Church, Redding, California says:

We won't break poverty through prayer and fasting, but through radical generosity.