

Generosity

***The Life Giving Power of
Doing Good to Others***

JAN GRACE

GENEROSITY
THE LIFE GIVING POWER OF
DOING GOOD TO OTHERS

By Jan Grace

GENEROSITY

THE LIFE GIVING POWER OF DOING GOOD TO OTHERS

Scriptural references marked as NKJV are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved

Scriptural references marked as NLT are taken from the:

Holy Bible, New Living Translation ®, copyright © 1996, 2004 by Tyndale Charitable Trust. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers. All rights reserved.

Scriptural references marked as The Message are taken from THE MESSAGE: The Bible in Contemporary Language © 2002 by Eugene H. Peterson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.)

Copyright 2014 by Jan Grace

GENEROSITY

THE LIFE GIVING POWER OF DOING GOOD TO OTHERS

Contents:

Introduction

Everyone

One Thing

Budgets, Faith and Presumption

The Law of Giving and Receiving

The Tithe and the Heart

Many Hands Make Little Work

Do Not Eat Your Seed

Generosity and the Miraculous

Take A Tip From Solomon

No Strings Attached

An Eternal Perspective

Finally

I recently published an eBook called "Breaking the Spirit of Poverty". The book was written to help people understand biblical principles regarding wealth and poverty. Many people, including Christians, are bound by the spirit of poverty and don't even realize it.

This book, "Generosity: The Life Giving Power of Doing Good To Others", explores the topic even further.

God has much to say in his word about generosity. For example:

Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go to you ahead of time, and prepare your generous gift beforehand, which you had previously promised, that it may be ready as a matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation. 2 Corinthians 9:5 NKJV

Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. 2 Corinthians 9:6 NLT

Yes, you will be enriched in every way so that you can always be generous. And when we take your gifts to those who need them, they will thank God. 2 Corinthians 9:11 NLT

Oh, how generous and gracious our Lord was! He filled me with the faith and love that come from Christ Jesus. 1 Timothy 1:14 NLT

Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and generous to those in need, always being ready to share with others. 1 Timothy 6:18 NLT

If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking. James 1:5 NLT

Generosity. God's way of living, of producing, of loving. There's nothing stingy about God, and as his children model his behavior they will find a brand new adventure awaits them. An adventure of life, production, and love.

Introduction

Welcome to God's world of generosity. If you aren't acquainted with this wonderful world you're in for a real treat. If you are, then you know exactly what I mean.

Regardless, you're in for God's life-giving power!

Creation itself is generous. I only have to look at my yard to notice that. Our neighbor's maple tree "helicopters" are flying everywhere. That one tree is determined to "bless" our whole block with its generosity.

Generosity can be likened to massive power generators used to supply electricity to such large cities as New York and Los Angeles. Generosity is the power generator for the kingdom of God.

Generosity isn't the main thing, of course. Where would any of us be without the demonstrated love of God? What kind of life would be possible without the love God revealed to mankind through God's Son, Jesus Christ?

But something, or someone, needed to share that precious love or nothing good would have come to mankind. Someone needed to be generous. And there was only one who had what we needed.

Generosity - the life-giving power of doing good to others.

God is generous. Though God would have every right to keep all of his goodies to himself, he doesn't. He shares. The author of everything good shares his goodness, and his good things, with mankind. Incredible.

No one earns a single good thing from God. God is simply generous. He could have hidden every good and perfect gift from us. No one could have reproved him if he had wanted to leave us alone to try and figure how to beg, borrow, or even steal in order to survive.

God is generous. And through his generosity we live.

God's generosity offers light to everyone in darkness; and peace to every tried and tormented soul. Joy comes to those who rest in God's generous assurance; for though the nighttime of weeping seems to last forever, joy always comes in the morning.

This is the life-giving power of generosity - doing good to others, simply because you can.

If you are new to the kingdom of God, or maybe hanging around the outside, pacing back and forth while trying to decide if you really should take the plunge and believe God, there is a rule I'd like to draw your attention towards.

Rule?

Yes, rule. A very expensive but invaluable rule; beyond all comprehension. It's the Golden Rule, as spoken by Jesus in the gospels.

Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you. This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets. Matthew 7:12 NLT

The apostle Paul gave us a glimpse of the Lord's generous spirit in his second letter to the Corinthians.

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might become rich. 2 Corinthians 8:9 NKJV

For your sake (and for mine) Jesus chose to give. He didn't give grudgingly, nor was he pressured into giving his life as a ransom. That act of giving is the greatest example of generosity ever. Giving for the sake of others.

May your heart be refreshed as you read this book. More than that, may you make a quality decision to live the life of generosity. *I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance. I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms. (Ephesians 1:18-20 NLT).*

Let our generous God reveal himself to you as the one who is always more than enough for every need.

Everyone

Everyone has something to give

There are many people who have bought into the notion that unless you're a rich person, you don't have anything to give. You can't be generous if that is your attitude. You will never experience the joy in giving if you always see yourself as poor, broke, or financially handicapped.

Besides, generosity is not about how much money a person has, or doesn't have. Generosity doesn't make decisions based solely on numbers, high or low. It merely wants to do what it does best - bless others.

And everyone can experience the joy and blessing of generosity; because everyone has something to give. NO exception.

"Then the Lord said to Elijah, "Go and live in the village of Zarephath, near the city of Sidon. I have instructed a widow there to feed you." So he went to Zarephath. As he arrived at the gates of the village, he saw a widow gathering sticks, and he asked her, "Would you please bring me a little water in a cup?" As she was going to get it, he called to her, "Bring me a bite of bread, too." But she said, "I swear by the Lord your God that I don't have a single piece of bread in the house. And I have only a handful of flour left in the jar and a little cooking oil in the bottom of the jug. I was just gathering a few sticks to cook this last meal, and then my son and I will die." But Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid! Go ahead and do just what you've said, but make a little bread for me first. Then use what's left to prepare a meal for yourself and your son. For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: There will always be flour and olive oil left in your containers until the time when the Lord sends rain and the crops grow again!" So she did as Elijah said, and she and Elijah and her son continued to eat for many days." 1 Kings 17:8-15 NLT

The widow woman had seen her share of tough times. Losing a husband, trying to raise her son as a single mom, couldn't keep a steady job; all those things plus the crippling famine they were all experiencing.

And now this arrogant "prophet" calls to her, demanding she give her last bite of bread to him. Preachers!

Like I said, everyone has something to give. Everyone has seed to sow as far as God is concerned (more on this in a later chapter).

To the woman, it looked like the end of the road for her and her son. To God and the prophet, it was the beginning of a whole new life. Generosity - the life giving power of doing good to others.

She had something to give. She had it in her hand. Sometimes what we have to give isn't in our hand, but rather in our heart. We give a smile, just

because. We give an hour of our time, just because. We give a meal, just because. We are generous, just because.

Because of the generous God who models generosity for us, and empowers us to do likewise.

There's one important principle to examine at this early juncture. A person can only be generous with something that's their own. I can't be generous with YOUR birthday cake. With your permission I can help serve it to others, but it's your cake. You will decide what to do with it.

Everyone can help someone else

"One day the widow of a member of the group of prophets came to Elisha and cried out, "My husband who served you is dead, and you know how he feared the Lord. But now a creditor has come, threatening to take my two sons as slaves." "What can I do to help you?" Elisha asked. "Tell me, what do you have in the house?" "Nothing at all, except a flask of olive oil," she replied. And Elisha said, "Borrow as many empty jars as you can from your friends and neighbors. Then go into your house with your sons and shut the door behind you. Pour olive oil from your flask into the jars, setting each one aside when it is filled." So she did as she was told. Her sons kept bringing jars to her, and she filled one after another. Soon every container was full to the brim! "Bring me another jar," she said to one of her sons. "There aren't any more!" he told her. And then the olive oil stopped flowing. When she told the man of God what had happened, he said to her, "Now sell the olive oil and pay your debts, and you and your sons can live on what is left over." 2 Kings 4:1-7 NLT

One of the best scriptures to remember: "What do you have in the house?" Not someone else's house. You're not to covet what someone else has. No, you are to take inventory of YOUR house. What do YOU have?

Look at the participants in this story. Elisha the prophet had a word from the Lord for the widow woman. That's what he had to generously share with the

others. The woman had a flask of olive oil. Apparently she had nothing else. Not a roll of paper towels, not a pillow, not a cup. At least she didn't think she had anything else. Sometimes we really need to look closely, but there will always be something God can use if we'll be generous. The sons were generous with their time and energy. The neighbors were generous with their property.

And God was generous with his miracle-working power.

Though it may seem like so little, it never takes much for a miracle. "Nothing, except a flask of olive oil." The widow was well on her way to a miracle; all she needed to do was release her only possession.

Possessions can bless you, or curse you. They can carry you far or jump on you to hold you back. Generosity looks beyond the possessions and sees the possibilities.

I wonder what her neighbors thought when she sent them a text, asking to borrow empty jars from them. Generosity begets generosity. One person acting generously, in faith, has an important role to play. The spirit in which they respond to God carries over to others who, in turn, do likewise.

What do you have, and what can you do, to help someone? What's in your warehouse of possessions that could be used to bless someone else? Are you holding on to someone else's miracle?

Remember, everyone can help someone else.

Everyone can touch someone

Think about both women in these scriptures. One received a miracle because she gave. She was generous. And, she obeyed the man of God. The second woman had a miracle happen in her house because she obeyed the man of God and was generous with the only thing she had left. Subsequently people got involved and helped her. THEY were generous.

Each person involved could have easily gone through the day thinking, "Nothing good or exciting ever happens around here." Yet when they became involved in the simple act of generosity, the miracle happened.

No matter who you are or what you have or don't have, you can touch someone. You can be the answer to someone's miracle.

If someone asks you for an empty jar, jump on it!

Maybe this is one reason Jesus said what he did in Matthew 5:42...

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away." Matthew 5:38-42 NKJV

Breaking free from the spirit of poverty is really as simple as determining to be generous. Yet it can be a very hard thing to do. If our trust is in what we are able to hold in our hand or bank account, we will find it very hard to be generous. But we can do it! We can be generous. We can be used of God to be a blessing to others. And in turn, we'll find God has our back completely covered.

One Thing

One thing that hinders

Now a certain ruler asked Him, saying, "Good teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but one, that is, God. You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Honor your father and your mother.'" And he said, "All these things I have kept from my youth." So when Jesus heard these things, he said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." But when he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich. Luke 18:18-23 NKJV

My son, give attention to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Do not let them depart from your eyes; keep them in the midst of your heart; for they are life to those who find them, and health to all their flesh. Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life. Proverbs 4:20-23 NKJV

When Jesus told the young man that he lacked "one thing", he could have just as easily said, "Young man, you lack the first thing. You agreed that you have kept commandments five through nine. But I see you having problems with the first commandment; actually the first half of the commandments.

"Those commandments relating to your relationship with God have been tripping you up all your life. 'You shall have no other God, you shall not make or worship idols, you shall not take the name of your God in vain, you shall remember the Sabbath and keep it holy, and you shall not covet.' If you will sell all you have, take all the proceeds and distribute them among the poor, then your treasure will be in heaven. You will find the joy of eternal life if you take care of that first thing."

Think about it. The issue with the young man wasn't his lack of love for God. It was his love for money and things. The Lord wasn't first in his life.

Though God never has a need for money, he knows we do. But having a need for it and idolizing it are two separate things. If we don't keep the main

thing the main thing, we will hear Jesus say the same thing. "Get rid of that which is robbing you of the kingdom joy which should be yours. Let it drop from your life and discover a brand new joy."

The young man could have lived free, if only he had obeyed the one who knew what was holding him back from what he was truly seeking.

How this relates with Proverbs four is this: as with the rich, young man, we have a tendency to weigh our circumstances and compare them with God's word. Depending on which is easier to do, we will either embrace the Word of God and obey it, or we will ignore it, choosing our own limited reasoning over God's eternal and unlimited wisdom.

Jesus presented the young man with a colossal deal! The trade of a lifetime; all he had for all Jesus could give. But the young man lost out because he didn't keep the main thing the main thing. One thing is all it took to keep the young man chained to his stuff. And one thing could have broken it, and set him free.

Generosity. We must not underestimate the power God is able to manifest through the simple act of giving. Releasing our stuff releases its hold on us and empowers it to be a blessing to others.

Our possessions have us shackled if Jesus can't tell us what to do with them. And if he can't tell us, how can we say we love him?

One thing to seek

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Matthew 6:33 NKJV

It's very hard to seek more than one thing at a time. It's even harder, if not impossible, to simultaneously seek the kingdom of God and material things.

Worry will not resolve our problems. Worry will not put bread on our table, pay our electric bill, or keep out the cold winter winds. Worry is seeking tomorrow's woes.

There is a difference between planning and worrying. Planning assesses the circumstances, examines the pros and cons, takes inventory of the resources available, comparing them with those needed, and establishes a step by step process to address the situation.

People who worry look at the circumstances, examine the pros and cons, take inventory of their resources only, comparing them with those needed, and because their resources are no match for the circumstances, give themselves over to worry. The more they look, the more they worry. And the vicious cycle continues.

"Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things." Matthew 6:25-32 NKJV

Generosity strips worry of all its power. To the generous soul, worry becomes nothing more than a fleeting thought and an opportunity to bless someone else.

Worry says to you, "What about your needs?" Generosity answers, "How can I help someone else?"

"Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh? Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, 'Here I am.' "If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, if you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul, then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday. The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones; you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail." Isaiah 58:6-11 NKJV

The world has many things designed for one purpose: to turn our heart and head away from the kingdom of God. That's why it's so important to seek first the kingdom of God. Not because the kingdom is so far away; but the very act of seeking, looking, searching for, God's way of living keeps the seeker actively engaged in God's business rather than inundated with the worries and cares which tend to snuff out any and all semblance of life.

Generosity seeks first the kingdom of God. After all, it's the kingdom's power plant.

One thing to nurture

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might become rich. 2 Corinthians 8:9 NKJV

Another picture of generosity, and its motivation. "Yet for your sakes..." is how generosity is displayed. Not for its own sake, not for its own

edification, and certainly not for money.

Developing a generous heart begins with trust in God. For when trust is the foundation, obedience follows without questioning or doubting. The heart that trusts will be a heart that's generous. As with Jesus, "I have come to do your will, O God" (Hebrews 1). And again, in 2 Corinthians 8:9 - "yet for your sakes."

Nurturing, feeding, developing; however you may want to say it, a generous spirit is as easy as looking someone in the eye and saying to them, "I will help you; no strings attached." Looking throughout the day for an opportunity to bless someone else is nurturing generosity. Of course, trust in God must be generosity's underlying base.

Many of us have spent numerous hours nurturing our gift of worrying. Countless hours have been wasted believing nothing good could ever happen to us. And while we've brewed and stewed the hours away, wanting so desperately for someone to show us some generosity, people have passed by us unnoticed. People whom God sent our way that we might bless.

Allow me to, once again, reiterate a thought regarding generosity. It is not about how much or how often we generously give "for your sake". It isn't a contest, there are no special bonus points, and it isn't to puff up one's pride. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 8:1, "Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies." That's what true generosity will do. It will edify, build up, and help display a truer picture of the grace of God.

Budgets, Faith and Presumption

Why are you saving?

Do you have a savings account? Are you participating in the stock market in any way? Why?

I ask these questions for only one purpose: so you will ask yourself why you are or why you are not saving.

Do you have a financial budget? Does it help you? Why do you budget? To spend more wisely and not impulsively? Why is that important?

Everything we do can and should be boiled down to one self-appraising question. What is our motive? Why do we do what we do?

Jesus spoke a parable, addressing the very thing: Why?

Then he spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?'

So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.'" But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." Luke 12:16-21 NKJV

Why did the certain rich man build new barns? Was it to bless others as God had blessed him? No. No one else was ever considered. Not God, not family members, not charities.

He was committed to one person only; himself.

That's why he saved. That's why he built the new barns. He was obsessed with riches.

No one can love God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength and be obsessed with money and things. People serve what they love; they'll do

anything for the one they truly worship. That's why no one can serve two masters. If they tried they'd be torn in two.

"No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." Luke 16:13 NKJV

"Mammon" equals "wealth"; specifically the love of wealth.

If money is our passion, it is impossible to be generous. Every decision we make will be based on the bottom line: cost versus results. Individuals, committees, and even churches operate on this principle. If they can't see tangible results, i.e. increase in attendance or giving, they will shut the program down; regardless of what God may be directing them to do.

So what's wrong with that? Aren't we supposed to be good stewards of that which God has blessed us with? Absolutely. But a steward isn't an owner. He is a manager. Big difference. The manager simply administers the desires and instructions of the owner.

Be very much aware of your motives. Do not believe you can live and breathe for money and still be faithful to God. It just won't happen.

Why are you giving?

Another question dealing directly with our motives.

There are a number of reasons why people give: guilty feeling, quid pro quo (something for something), tax deduction, appearance, threat or coercion, duty, promise, and just because they want to.

Why do you give? Why did these mentioned in the book of Acts give?

"Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they

distributed to each as anyone had need. And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." Acts 4:34-5:4 NKJV

Why did Barnabas give? Was everyone instructed to sell their house and land, bring all the proceeds to the apostles, and live together communally? No. There doesn't seem to be any indication of that whatsoever.

However, there is evidence of the Holy Spirit's work among the new, infant church. A work of holiness and power, and a work of generosity. People who had lands (plural) and/or houses (again, plural) sold the properties and brought the money to the apostles. They gave because they wanted to, believed the Holy Spirit was directing them to, and because they were full of the love of God.

Unfortunately Ananias didn't see things the same way as others. He wasn't motivated by the same spirit of generosity others were. He wanted to get in on whatever God was going to do. But God caught him in the lie.

Budgeted generosity

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come. And when I come, whomever you approve by your letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem. But if it is fitting that I go also, they will go with me. 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 NKJV

And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.
Acts 11:27-30 NKJV

Using a budget is a great way to be disciplined in money matters. But when establishing what the budget will be, be sure to include an amount for generous giving.

On different occasions, the early church received gifts from the believers to be used to help other believers. Paul advised the Corinthians to "lay something aside", or earmark it, budget it for his arrival.

Laying something aside for "emergency giving" is just as important as creating a "rainy day fund" for yourself. Preparing for the emergencies of your brothers and sisters is a sure-fire way to see God's glory in your own life.

The Law of Giving and Receiving

Seedtime and Harvest

After the Great Flood, God gave the following promise to Noah.

"While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease." Genesis 8:22 NKJV

God established the law of giving and receiving - also known as the law of sowing and reaping, or the law of seedtime and harvest. What you sow, you reap. An irrefutable law. It works every time.

Paul spoke of giving and receiving in his letter to the Philippians.

Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God. And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:15-19 NKJV

The Philippian church had entered into an incredible relationship with the apostle Paul. Their generosity helped sustain Paul's apostolic ministry, much in the same way the ravens took care of the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 17).

And Paul knew that because of their generosity, the Philippians had positioned themselves to be sustained by God through any and every circumstance. They had partnered with Paul, like a seed partners with the ground. Sowing into the gospel grows a harvest worth reaping.

Generosity cannot be contained any more than one can contain the little dandelion seeds once the flower has blossomed and the wind has scattered the seeds. The generous soul will always find a way to reap a continuous harvest.

Such is the man who prospers in all his ways.

"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law he meditates day and night. He shall

be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper." Psalm 1:1-3 NKJV

Sack Lunch and Harvest

"Now the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near. Then Jesus lifted up his eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" But this he said to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little." One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?" Then Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks he distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted. So when they were filled, he said to his disciples "Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost." Therefore they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten." John 6:4-13 NKJV

Please read this part closely, for it's the crux of everything associated with Jesus, Father God, the Holy Spirit, and the Church. Generosity has one main focus: the harvest. Gathering in the souls of men and women, boys and girls; people who have received the gospel, which it is in truth, the word of God. Every generous act, every generous seed sown, every cup of cold water given in the name of Jesus, is a seed sown for the harvest.

Even a sack lunch can be harvest seed.

The disciples weren't quite sure what to do with the boy's brown bag of food. But Jesus knew. Receiving it from the lad, he opened it, pulled out a fish and some bread, looked up to heaven and gave thanks. Thanks for seed to sow and for a harvest to reap.

Talk about a church outreach plan.

Don't miss this: the disciples didn't wrestle the sack lunch from the boy. Remember, you can't be generous with someone else's stuff. The boy had to first offer it as a gift to the disciples and/or Jesus. So the boy heard of the need, saw the opportunity to be involved with what God was doing, and presented himself and his gift to the Lord.

And Jesus took things from there.

By the way, when they gathered up the leftovers, I kind of think they gave them to the kid. After all, what you sow, you reap.

Over five thousand people were touched by God that day, largely due to the generosity of the young boy and his sack lunch.

Sacrifice and Harvest

Much in the same way the multitude was fed by the little kid's lunch, resulting in the community's door opening to the gospel, so it was in the book of Acts.

Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. Acts 4:32-33 NKJV

One heart and one soul; generous with and to each other. When one person had a need there was someone standing in the wings to take care of it. And because the people weren't fighting with each other, they could stand together for kingdom objectives.

Objectives such as preaching the gospel with heaven-sent power. "They had all things common" opened the door for "With great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus." Generosity makes room, plants seeds, for a miracle to take place.

It works the same way today. Generosity opens doors, plants seeds, and makes room for the Holy Spirit to convict the sinner, convince the skeptic, and comfort the saint with divine assurance. Holy Spirit power and authority is manifested in an atmosphere of faith brought about largely by people like you and I passionately in love with Jesus and each other.

And generosity helps build the road to that kind of manifested power.

The Tithe and the Heart

Stumbling over 10%

Tithe, which means ten percent, is not well understood. It's appreciated even less.

Why? Basically because people don't want anyone telling them how much they should give. Well, do you want someone telling you how much to drop into the offering plate each week?

So people cringe every time they hear the word, "Tithe". Some stumble over the number ten, others demand it from their parishioners. Others are delighted to give, and still others give it dutifully with little or no regard to its purpose, or their opportunity for greater intimacy with God.

But is that acceptable to God? And is God so fussy about numbers that he would ignore any gift that fell short of that ecclesiastically approved percentage known as "the tithe"?

Yes and no.

Generosity and tithe can be used together. In fact, I believe they SHOULD be used together.

The tithe, though practiced before the law and demanded by the law, isn't a matter of law. And neither are any of the other 612 laws initially given by God through Moses.

Think of the Ten Commandments. I know they aren't suggestions, but is each commandment the total manner of behavior God is wanting to get out of his people? (see Exodus 20 for complete text).

1. *You shall have no other gods before me.*
2. *You shall not make for yourself any carved image or idol.*
3. *You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.*
4. *Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.*
5. *Honor your father and your mother.*
6. *You shall not murder.*
7. *You shall not commit adultery.*
8. *You shall not steal.*
9. *You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*
10. *You shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor.*

If a person was capable of keeping each of these commandments, would that completely please the Lord? What if the person took each item, right down the list, and disciplined themselves to such an extent they never once violated a commandment.

Would that make the Lord stand up and take notice?

Or, is it more in line with God's character that we allow him to mark those commandments on our heart; that we do or not do things based on the love relationship we have with him?

As it's always been, it's a matter of the heart. The thing that pleases God isn't my total adherence to his rules and regulations, but my heart's allegiance and responsiveness to his desires. Here's an example.

So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. 2 Corinthians 9:7 NKJV

The Amplified Translation reads like this:

"Let each one [give] as he has made up his own mind and purposed in his heart, not reluctantly or sorrowfully or under compulsion, for God loves (He takes pleasure in, prizes above other things, and is unwilling to abandon or to do without) a cheerful (joyous, "prompt to do it") giver [whose heart is in his giving]."

Can you see the difference between tithing out of duty and "purposing in his heart, not reluctantly..."? Think of the Father's joy when his kids are cheerful givers; whose heart is in their giving. That's what he desires from each of us.

Get over the mountain of ten percent. Instead, ask the Lord to help you develop a generous heart. You will soon experience much more than you ever thought possible. You see, once the windows of Heaven are opened wide and the devourer is rebuked for your sake (Malachi 3:11), a whole new life of heaven on earth begins to take place.

Safeguarding the heart

Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life. 1 Timothy 6:17-19 NKJV

Warnings concerning greed and covetousness abound in the word of God. That should give each of us a clue that we should pay attention to our heart's desires.

I love what Paul wrote to Timothy in the above passage. It exposes the potential problems (pride and greed) rich people may have, and it gives the action plan one can use for safeguarding ones heart. The action plan? Do good, be rich in good works, ready to give, and willing to share. In short, be generous.

Let your heart be a generous heart, no matter how much money or stuff you may have accumulated over the years. Keep your heart tender to the needs of others.

There's a word Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica that I find very interesting.

For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: if anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread. But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good. 2 Thessalonians 3:10-13 NKJV

Years ago, after getting out of the Army, I settled upon the task of locating a home church for my family and I. One Sunday morning I arrived at a certain church just in time for Sunday School. The pastor was teaching the class and the above portion of scripture was the lesson text.

Things were normal for about the first 35 minutes. However, someone felt obligated to tell everyone about all the lazy people a relative had living at their house. Won't work, won't help out, on and on they went. Well, that sparked more "testimony" about homeless people and the dregs of society.

People really liked the verse, "If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat." In fact, the pastor liked it so much that whenever someone would try and defend people who are just down on their "luck", he'd repeat the verse over and over.

Someone attempted to read another verse in the passage, "But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good", but couldn't be heard. By the way; I decided that church probably wasn't the one for my family and I.

Yes, sometimes people are lazy. Sometimes we shouldn't help them. But we must guard our heart, keeping it from growing hard and calloused toward the needy and unfortunate. "Do not grow weary in doing good" is a word to help our heart stay soft and sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading.

Windows of Heaven/Doorway of Destruction

When I was a pastor, I always enjoyed saying to the congregation, "Please turn to Malachi, chapter three." I'd hear little whispers, and once in a while, a groan or two.

What was exceptional fun was to then add, "And no, I'm not preaching about the tithe today." A few chuckles, more whispers, and a sigh or two.

And I'm not going to emphasize the tithe here. Why? Because to me the tithe is only a number. It's a good place to begin training yourself to be generous, but it isn't the heart of the matter. The heart of the matter is the heart.

Here is the passage from Malachi that we'll reference:

"For I am the Lord, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob. Yet from the days of your fathers you have gone away from my ordinances and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you," says the Lord of hosts. "But you said, 'In what way shall we return?' 'Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed you?' In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house, and try me now in this," says the Lord of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.

"And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, So that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field," says the Lord of hosts; and all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a delightful land," says the Lord of hosts.

Malachi 3:6-12 NKJV

Many have taught, and I have as well, that the Lord tells us to prove him, test him, by tithing. I don't believe that any longer. And here's the reason why.

The Lord told the Hebrew nation that they had departed from him. They replied, "What?!? What are you talking about? We worship you, attend services each Sabbath; what do you mean we've departed?" He said, "By withholding your tithes."

"Oh."

Do you know many "tithers"? I've known a number of them through the years. In fact, I'm a tither. But did you realize people may tithe and still be far from God? Sad, but true.

The Hebrews could have been tithing, but still be running away from God.

Let's say, just for teaching purposes, that God had given the Israelites this commandment: "You shall not walk on the grass." For years, the Hebrew children stayed off the grass. But one day a rebel began walking barefoot in the grass. He enjoyed it so much, he started telling everyone he met about the joy of doing things their own way. He even started blogging, posting pictures of God's people all over the world walking barefoot in the grass.

God, finally tired of all the rebellion and mockery, appoints the prophet Malachi to proclaim the word about returning to the Lord. Malachi said, "The Lord says you have left me by walking on the grass. Return to me." "How?" "Stop walking on the grass!"

Tithing wouldn't have brought them back to God in my example. Sacrifice of any kind never covers ongoing disobedience.

So in Malachi three, the tithe isn't really God's focal point. What is? Obedience.

"You are cursed with a curse! Therefore, quit walking on the grass and see if I'll not open for you the windows of heaven. Watch me pour out for you more blessing than you can handle."

"And I'll rebuke the devourer for your sake."

It's not about the tithe, it's about obedience. And so is giving. So is generosity.

Allowing the Lord to direct every part of our lives (to include ALL of our finances) is where generosity and obedience connect. He leads, we follow. His leading includes every help Heaven has to offer. Disobedience has a way of slamming shut any heavenly windows. Instead, doors of destruction seem to open at the most inopportune times.

There is a God in Heaven who is so in love with you and I, the only way to describe it is by using such words as whip, cross, and empty tomb. Get the picture? He has a wonderful life in store for anyone who'll simply trust him enough to follow his lead.

May our hearts be willing to do just that. Don't let the word "tithe" trip you up. Instead, allow your heart to fall in love over and over with Jesus. A generous, prompt to obey spirit will develop.

Many Hands Make Little Work

Goat hair for God?

Goat hair? In the days following Israel's miraculous departure from Egypt, the Lord commanded Moses to receive an offering from the people. It was what we in the church would call a "designated offering". God was having the children of Israel construct a portable tabernacle, a special tent, where he and his people could meet.

And Moses spoke to all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying, "This is the thing which the Lord commanded, saying: 'Take from among you an offering to the Lord. Whoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it as an offering to the Lord: gold, silver, and bronze; blue, purple, and scarlet thread, fine linen, and goats' hair; ram skins dyed red, badger skins, and acacia wood; oil for the light, and spices for the anointing oil and for the sweet incense; onyx stones, and stones to be set in the ephod and in the breastplate. Exodus 35:4-9 NKJV

Notice the phrase, "Whoever is of a willing heart...". A willing heart; i.e. generous, magnanimous. God did not want his dwelling place built out of gifts that weren't really gifts.

The list of items requested for the tabernacle is quite diverse. Gold, colored thread, goat hair. Anyone looking only at the list, and not understanding the purpose of each item, would certainly have to wonder why such an eclectic group of items was needed.

But isn't that how the Lord works? He uses what we have to give, doesn't he? Talk about eclectic! And though we may not understand how our gift fits into the master plan, somehow God makes it work. In fact, it's the way he designed it to work.

Anyone with a willing heart. Does that mean there were some who didn't give?

It's a principle seen throughout the word of God. Willing hearts, many gifts, all joined together for one express purpose - to reveal the glory of God. To become a testimony of God among his people.

And all it takes to be included is a willing heart. A generous heart that is more concerned with the big plan than its own little world.

Besides, who else but God could use goat hair?

Gifts for the gifted

Have you ever thought, "What's my purpose? What good am I to anyone? Even if I were to have a gift from God, so what?"

Many people, at some point in their life, experience those thoughts. But understanding how liberating a generous, willing heart can be will also energize one's desire to be joined to something bigger than themselves.

Then Moses called Bezalel and Aholiab, and every gifted artisan in whose heart the Lord had put wisdom, everyone whose heart was stirred, to come and do the work. And they received from Moses all the offering which the children of Israel had brought for the work of the service of making the sanctuary. So they continued bringing to him freewill offerings every morning. Exodus 36:2-3 NKJV

Reading through the thirty-fifth and thirty-sixth chapters of Exodus, you'll discover the children of Israel actually did what the Lord wanted. That in itself is miraculous. Anyway, the Lord told Moses he had called and anointed a couple of guys to oversee the work of building the tabernacle.

Next, as Moses called the gifted artisans together, he gave to them, placed in their hands, all the offerings the people had generously donated. And still the gifts kept coming in.

You and I may not understand what our gift is exactly, or how we're supposed to use it. In fact, it may be impossible to know UNTIL we

willingly present it to God.

For instance, picture the guy who had the goat hair to give. I can see him holding it in his hand, looking at it from every angle he could think of. There was no way he could really estimate the value of his gift, or know the purpose of it, until it was placed into the artisan's hands and added to the gifts others had given.

The other gifts, joined together, helped define the purpose and value of the gift. Without the others, it was simply goat hair.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. Romans 12:1 NKJV

Generosity brings the Glory

Try and imagine what it was like that day when the tent was completed. Every part joined together, giving honor, value, and definition to the other parts. Gifts like the goat hair and badger skin, that normally wouldn't be thought of as gifts at all, discovered themselves displayed right next to the "important" gifts like gold and silver.

All the parts joined together, creating one message for the world to see: "God lives here!"

Notice this passage from Exodus chapter 40:

And he raised up the court all around the tabernacle and the altar, and hung up the screen of the court gate. So Moses finished the work. Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.

Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, the children of Israel would go onward in all their journeys. But if the cloud was not taken

up, then they did not journey till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the Lord was above the tabernacle by day, and fire was over it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys.

Exodus 40:33-38 NKJV

The Glory of God came when the tabernacle was completed. And because people willingly gave, even to the point where they had to be told to quit giving, God was able to reveal himself as never before.

You, yes you, are important to God. You are also important to God's people and God's plans and purposes. You add something valuable to the work of God.

He's calling you to give yourself to him. Willingly, without reservation, and cheerfully. See what he can do with who you are.

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. Ephesians 2:19-22 NKJV

Do Not Eat Your Seed

Sunflower seeds are a favorite snack of mine. I love to grab a handful of seeds and throw them into my mouth, shells and all. Of course, cracking the shell, separating the nut from the shell, and then spitting out the empty shell is almost as much fun as eating the seed.

But I wouldn't eat them if they were supposed to be planted. That would be foolish.

The difference between seeds and bread

But this I say: he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. As it is written:

"He has dispersed abroad, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."

*Now may he who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God. 2 Corinthians 9:6-12
NKJV*

God supplies seed to plant and bread to eat. It's important to know the difference.

It's also important to understand something about your seed, your soil, the amount of moisture needed, and the length of the growing season.

Did you know that everyone has some kind of seed to sow? Absolutely. Everyone has something they can sow into someone else's life and/or ministry. It may not seem like very much, but everything sown generously has the prospect of producing a fruitful harvest.

The other day I noticed there were some bare spots in my yard; places where no grass was growing. I had a partial bag of seed left over from a previous project, so I decided to use the rest of my seed to try and make the lawn look a little nicer.

I loosened the soil, leveled it, grabbed a handful of seed and commenced sprinkling the seed over the bare places. Then I drug out the water hose, sprayed the ground, and waited.

Guess what? The seeds didn't immediately show signs of growth. Not in the least. But after a couple of weeks I noticed the new grass coming up.

The seed in your hand represents your future. The bread on your plate testifies God has blessed you with what you need for the day. Hoard the seed and you'll have no future. Plant the bread and, again, your future will be bleak and your present strength will fail.

God gives us the power to get wealth (Deuteronomy 8:18), to help establish his kingdom and declare his covenantal love and provision to those who will listen and respond to his call. The wealth is divided into bread and seed. Again, bread helps cover the day's needs. The seed is preparation for the future.

Generally speaking, excess is seed. But not every time. The widow woman in Elijah's day had something she could either give or eat. However, if her life was to continue it was necessary for her to give rather than eat.

So she said, "As the Lord your God lives, I do not have bread, only a handful of flour in a bin, and a little oil in a jar; and see, I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die." And Elijah said to her, "Do not fear; go and do as you have said, but make me a small cake from it first, and bring it to me; and afterward make some for yourself and your son. For thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the Lord sends rain on the earth.'" 1 Kings 17:12-14 NKJV

She said she didn't have any bread. But that wasn't exactly true. She had the flour and oil to make bread, which was all she had to use for seed to sustain her future. "Make mine first", the prophet said. What he meant was, "Sow

into my life first. God will cause your seed of righteousness to flourish; you and your family will live off of the harvest."

Seeds planted reap a harvest of thanksgiving to God

But this I say: he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. 2 Corinthians 9:6-8 NKJV

Sparingly is how some people enjoy giving. Yet those same people wonder why they always end up with more month than money. If you desire to bless others, you'll need to keep refilling yourself, your cupboards, your fuel tank; every part of your life.

Generous people feed the world. They plant more than they themselves could ever use.

There's another part to this sowing and reaping principle we need to understand. Besides knowing how to be generous it's important for us to know how to reap (or receive). There are some people who, because of pride, can't receive anything from anyone, ever. They feel they have to earn everything somehow. Or, when they finally open up a little when someone sows into their life, they feel as though they can't keep it. They turn right around and give it away.

Maybe you've known people who are, what I refer to as, "ledger" people. They can't do anything nice for someone on a "just because" basis; no, they always have to even the score. Take them out to eat and they'll immediately check their calendar for a day they can reciprocate. And if they do something nice for you first, in the back of their mind they are expecting the same done for them.

Of course it's nice to return the favor. But people who are generous won't make a big deal out of it. They don't give to be seen. They give to bless, out of the generosity of their heart.

[W]hile you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God. 2 Corinthians 9:11 NKJV

If a lifestyle of generosity is something you're after, you must learn how to say two small but powerful words. "Thank you." Because you are going to have people sowing into your life on the right hand and on the left. Remember Galatians 6:7-10?

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith. NKJV

And how about these words spoken by our savior?

"Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you." Luke 6:38 NKJV

Yes, just a polite "thank you" is all you need to say.

Again, wise people don't eat their seed OR stomp on the bread people have given.

Planting with a purpose

Imagine the farmer who gets up one spring morning, walks out to his barn, opens up a bag of seed (he doesn't care which kind of seed - doesn't matter to him, that's God's business), climbs onto his tractor and spends the day throwing seed onto the ground. Do you think he'll have a large harvest come fall? You don't? Why not?

Could it be because he didn't plan, didn't prepare, and didn't plant with a purpose? People like our imaginary farmer will be those who whine about God not taking care of them. They'll be the ones who don't pay any attention to the weeds among the crops, or whether they need to irrigate. They will "try this planting stuff", and it better work or they'll try something different.

Giving the tithe (Malachi 3) is one way to plant with a purpose. The purpose? To honor and bless the Lord, to help support the ministry of the local church, to take aim at any spirit of greed or covetousness which may be lurking in the area, partner with God in helping meet the needs of the poor (Proverbs 19:17), and to live and minister, knowing Heaven's windows are wide open and all of your needs are met.

Generously and purposely sowing into the lives of others always leads to a bright future.

Generosity and the Miraculous

Miraculous Harvest of Souls

What I'm about to say must be understood within its context. There's a definite correlation between generosity and the working of miracles. I am NOT saying that if you or anyone else gives a certain amount of money to the church, an evangelist, or an apostle it will guarantee a miracle or healing.

But there really is a connection between generosity and miracles. Why? Because generous people are more apt to be in a "receiving position" than those who are tight or stingy.

The way you give is the way you receive.

Whether it's a harvest of souls you're concerned about, or next month's rent money; generosity affects how people respond AND how freely the Spirit of God can operate.

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.

So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. Acts 2:42-47 NKJV

Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.

Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith. Acts 6:1-7 NKJV

The people had "freely received" from the Lord and were "freely giving" (Matthew 10:8); caring for each other in whatever way they could. The

same Spirit who influenced their behavior was able to influence those who heard the word, thus bringing many into the kingdom of God.

It seems that many Christians don't realize their role in the harvest of souls.

People are much more apt to listen to you and I present the gospel to them if we're nice. Generous people tend to be nicer than tight wads.

If we're going to effectively touch our world, somehow generosity must play a key role.

Miraculous Healings

Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Acts 2:43 NKJV

And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. Acts 4:33 NKJV

Obscure passages? No. These are stuck right in the middle of the verses we just referred to. The spirit of generosity prevailed throughout the church in the early days. They weren't stingy, they took care of each other, and powerful healings and miracles took place among them. With great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of Jesus. In other words, they did the same things, i.e. signs and wonders, miracles and healings, that Jesus did during his earthly ministry.

Miraculous Unity

Generosity allowed people who were socially and culturally different to experience unity in a miraculous manner.

Again, I'll refer to the sixth chapter of Acts.

Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their

widows were neglected in the daily distribution. Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." And the saying pleased the whole multitude. Acts 6:1-5 NKJV

Tension was high when some perceived "their group" was receiving disparate treatment. The Greek Jews felt their widows were being slighted by those in charge of the finances.

How did generosity make a positive difference? Up to this point, the twelve apostles had the responsibility to make every decision and care for all the flock. Their situation was not unlike Moses' counseling dilemma (Exodus 18).

But the apostles, led by the Spirit of God (I'm sure), generously yielded to the people and allowed them to choose people who could help correct any oversight. And, most of the seven chosen were Greek Jews.

Because of the people displaying and operating with a generous heart, the apostles had more study and prayer time, people were cared for consistently and equitably, and the work of God continued to increase.

And, "The saying pleased the whole multitude." Amazing.

Generosity - the amazing characteristic of the revival spirit.

Take A Tip From Solomon

The generous will prosper; those who refresh others will themselves be refreshed. Proverbs 11:25 NLT

Blessed are those who are generous, because they feed the poor. Proverbs 22:9 NLT

King Solomon had a whole book of timely tips back in the day. In fact, his tips are still beneficial for people living in today's world.

A Tip About Honoring

Honor the Lord with your possessions, and with the first fruits of all your increase; so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine. Proverbs 3:9-10 NKJV

A man's pride will bring him low, but the humble in spirit will retain honor. Proverbs 29:23 NKJV

Honor the Lord, or display his worth and value (what he means to you). I paraphrase Proverbs 3:9 this way: "Show God and others what God really means to you by what you do with the things you have and the things you get."

If I say I love God, can I really be stingy with what I have? I don't believe so. If I boast of how much God means to me, can I still keep a tight fist around all my stuff? If God is "in charge of my life" like I say he is, shouldn't I let him direct my every step?

The way we honor God will determine how he honors us (29:23).

A Tip About Watering

The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself. Proverbs 11:25 NKJV

Let's look at that verse again, but this time at its opposite. "The tightfisted soul will be made poor, and he who withholds water will himself die of thirst."

If the positive is true, which it is, then the opposite must also be true.

How often do you "water" others? How often do you bless someone with acts of kindness and generosity? Do you look for ways to help others on their life's journey? Is your heart open to the Lord, and others? Remember, a heart closed to others is closed to God as well. If you're stingy with people, you'll be stingy with God.

What does it mean to "water"? The Hebrew word, *ravah*, used in Proverbs 11:25 and throughout the Old Testament, means "to satiate, slake the thirst (or appetite), to abundantly satisfy." It isn't a word that describes a bare minimum. It's not a picture of someone who sees a need, but refuses to do anything toward meeting that need.

To water someone is to recognize their need for water (food, money, time, attention, or whatever) and generously meet that need out of your own resources.

Here's an illustration which just might help you understand the concept. You see, there are many people who "would like to give", "would like to be generous", but they just don't have very much. They "only have so much", "living on a fixed income", etc.

Most people have a garden hose attached to the faucet at the side of their house. Or, at one time have used a hose. At any given time, a garden hose will have some amount of water in it. It may be several weeks since it was last used, but there'll probably be some water still in the hose.

The water left in the hose can be likened to stinginess. How? The people who say they'd like to help others but can't will point to their almost empty hose. "This water is all I have and I can't afford to give it up." Sad, don't you think?

The generous soul, the person who is watered because he waters others, is the person who looks at the faucet rather than the hose. Turn on the spigot. Open up the valve. Water will flow through the hose to others, and when finished, will have water left over.

Generosity is turning on the spigot of our heart. It's doing what we can to help someone else, and trusting God to replenish what we used to bless others.

Take a tip from God. Open the spigot of your heart.

A Tip About "Fat" People and Poor Folk

The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself. Proverbs 11:25 KJV

The King James Version reads "fat" instead of "rich". The word actually means fat, but not physically fat. Satisfied, satiated, and anointed are some of the words used to illustrate the word translated "fat" in the KJV. Quite a picture, though.

Fat people, those satisfied by God, are people who don't just live their lives among other fat folks, ogling each other's goodies. Fat people, generous people, are involved in the lives of others less fortunate. They look for ways to water others. They want to help "poor" folk.

He who has pity on the poor lends to the Lord, and he will pay back what he has given. Proverbs 19:17 NKJV

Pitying the poor is much more than saying, "Tsk, tsk. I sure feel sorry for them." It is feeling sorry, but going beyond the feeling to action. "I feel sorry for them, so here's what I'm going to do."

"Lends to the Lord" means to join with, intertwine oneself with what God is doing and wanting to do. Working together with God for the benefit of

someone less fortunate.

"Pay back again" simply is this: God keeps good books. God repays the generous with his generosity.

Remember the story of Peter and Jesus in Luke, chapter 5?

One day as Jesus was preaching on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, great crowds pressed in on him to listen to the word of God. He noticed two empty boats at the water's edge, for the fishermen had left them and were washing their nets. Stepping into one of the boats, Jesus asked Simon, its owner, to push it out into the water. So he sat in the boat and taught the crowds from there. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Now go out where it is deeper, and let down your nets to catch some fish." "Master," Simon replied, "we worked hard all last night and didn't catch a thing. But if you say so, I'll let the nets down again." And this time their nets were so full of fish they began to tear! A shout for help brought their partners in the other boat, and soon both boats were filled with fish and on the verge of sinking. When Simon Peter realized what had happened, he fell to his knees before Jesus and said, "Oh, Lord, please leave me—I'm too much of a sinner to be around you." For he was awestruck by the number of fish they had caught, as were the others with him. His partners, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were also amazed. Luke 5:1-10 NLT

The "poor" folk were people who hadn't heard Jesus' teaching. Jesus asked to borrow Peter's boat and Peter's time. In a way, Peter gave to the poor. The large catch of fish was the Lord's way of "paying back".

Peter didn't demand payment for his time and use of the boat. Remember, God keeps good books. You and I don't need to. Our sole responsibility is to love God and love people, generously; and let the Lord take care of the rest.

No Strings Attached

God blesses giving, not lofty intentions

If you preach, just preach God's Message, nothing else; if you help, just help, don't take over; if you teach, stick to your teaching; if you give encouraging guidance, be careful that you don't get bossy; if you're put in charge, don't manipulate; if you're called to give aid to people in distress, keep your eyes open and be quick to respond; if you work with the disadvantaged, don't let yourself get irritated with them or depressed by them. Keep a smile on your face. Romans 12:6-8 The Message

Praise the Lord! How joyful are those who fear the Lord and delight in obeying his commands. Their children will be successful everywhere; an entire generation of godly people will be blessed. They themselves will be wealthy, and their good deeds will last forever. Light shines in the darkness for the godly. They are generous, compassionate, and righteous. Good comes to those who lend money generously and conduct their business fairly. Such people will not be overcome by evil. Those who are righteous will be long remembered. They do not fear bad news; they confidently trust the Lord to care for them. They are confident and fearless and can face their foes triumphantly. They share freely and give generously to those in need. Their good deeds will be remembered forever. They will have influence and honor. The wicked will see this and be infuriated. They will grind their teeth in anger; they will slink away, their hopes thwarted. Psalms 112 NLT

"When I become rich, I will give and give generously." Ah, those famous last words.

Did you notice what Paul wrote to the Romans? "...if you're called to give aid to people in distress, keep your eyes open and be quick to respond...".

He didn't say, when you become filthy rich... No, if you're called...

The Lord inspired the psalmist to write: "They share freely and give generously to those in need." Freely and generously. The blessings of God are upon the doers of the word, not those who only dream about obeying him.

Gifts aren't gifts if strings are attached

What do I mean by "strings"? There are people who love to "give" to others, and along with the "gift", are instructions on how to use the gift. "I'm giving you this money so you'll take a vacation." The phrase seems innocent enough, doesn't it? But there's something attached; "take a vacation."

But what if the person has another, more pressing need at the time? Like, maybe their oven just gave up the ghost, their car needs new tires, or the baby needs new shoes. Vacation?

But they can't use their "gift" because it is earmarked for something else.

And what about giving to the poor, or better yet, the homeless person who stands on the corner of a busy intersection with his sign, "Out of work veteran. Please help", and his three-legged dog? Would it be giving if I gave him twenty dollars and told him to buy food for himself and his three-legged companion? No, it would be something different.

How about the vagrant who walks into the church office, asking for a hand-out? Their story is they haven't eaten in four days. Would it be giving to take the person to the grocery store and buy him several bags of groceries? Yes.

If you don't feel right about giving per the person's request, don't give. But if you're going to give, remove your demands and trust God.

Generosity gives up its right to control

The generous one himself, God Almighty, gave up his right to control how we use his gifts. Jesus, God's indescribable gift (2 Corinthians 9:15), was given to us for our salvation. While it's true that he's the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6), we don't have to acknowledge him at all. We can ignore him, cuss at him, refer to him as the man upstairs, or love him with all our heart. We have the right to do with him whatever we like.

Of course, there are consequences to how a gift is used. For instance, if the person who asked for money to buy food takes the money and purchases a couple of quarts of beer, that's not our issue. And, they'll still be hungry.

If people don't receive our gift with the same intent we had when we gave it, then so be it. That simply goes with generosity.

Our responsibility is to be generous, which requires releasing control of the gift.

Be generous, give, water others, and trust God.

An Eternal Perspective

Life consists of much more than things

Everyone on earth has something. Oh, it may not be much, but it's something. It may only be a single, dirty loin cloth; but it's something.

Take a moment and examine your life. How many things do you have? Are you "loaded"? Don't look at others and compare your stuff with theirs. Do you have a lot of things, are do you only have a few?

Regardless of how many things you have, there will come a day when all of the things you and I feel are so important to have will fall from our lifeless fingers. Each one of those things could have demanded so much of our time, talent and treasure; but they're only temporary.

But there is a gift which is eternal.

"For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16 NLT

Everyone who believes in him... are YOU one who believes in Jesus? I'm not referring to the kind of belief that means you only believe he existed a couple of thousand years ago. Nor am I implying you have a belief he exists today, somewhere off in Heaven.

Is he your Lord and Savior?

We were the homeless vagrant, the guy standing on the corner with our sign and crippled dog. God is the one, in the person of his son, who came along and offered us the gift of eternal life.

When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. Romans 5:6-9 NLT

Receiving the gift is the greatest one thing a person will ever do with their life. It marks the beginning of a brand new life; one which will last forever.

Along with eternal life comes a new nature. The apostle Paul wrote how God makes the new believer a new creation in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17).

You know the generous grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty he could make you

rich. 2 Corinthians 8:9 NLT

The generous grace of Jesus...saw our need and gave accordingly.

Life is enriched by the spirit of generosity

The Lord's generosity changed mankind's future forever. To as many as receive him, he gives the right and privilege to be called sons and daughters of God. And he who waters will himself be watered. God's generosity also provided for himself a brand new family.

God lives by his own laws and decrees. And so should we.

Generosity is the way to live. It's how heaven operates. It's how the earth continues to feed all seven billion inhabitants. Generosity.

Follow God's example

The Lord calls us to walk in his steps, loving others with the love he pours into our hearts. Generously.

Why would we want to even think of doing things differently?

Finally

Exceedingly abundantly above

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us... Ephesians 3:20 NKJV

With God there are no limits. Therefore, walking with God means there are no limits with us. We have the freedom and the joy of being generous. We choose to give, good measure, pressed down, shaken together, blessing someone else with some of that which we've received from the Lord. He is the one who has given us the power to get wealth. He's the one who established the principles of seedtime and harvest. He's the one who won't, and can't, be mocked; for he's declared whatever we sow, we also reap.

No limits. He is able and he'll do whatever's necessary in order to keep us supplied with resources. Resources that enable us to live a life of generosity.

The faithful flourish

A faithful man will abound with blessings, but he who hastens to be rich will not go unpunished. Proverbs 28:20 NKJV

The faithful, those who won't be moved away from doing the right thing, who can't be dissuaded from their eternal resolve to imitate their God in every way possible, will never cease from flourishing with the rich blessings of their Lord.

The life of generosity is for everyone. Both the haves and the have-nots are invited to take part in this magnificent life. A life that flows with the abundant provision of God.

Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers. But they delight in the law of the Lord, meditating on it day and night. They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season. Their leaves never wither, and they prosper in all they do. Psalm 1:1-3 NLT

Yes, the invitation is for everyone.

Are you ready for a change? Are you ready to step into a world where God's abundance is experienced? A land of promise; the flowing of milk and honey. An opportunity to experience the words of Jesus: "It's more blessed to give than receive"?

Then maybe you'll want to pray this prayer:

"Lord Jesus, first of all I ask you to forgive me of all my sin. Your death brought forgiveness, and your resurrection obtained victorious living for all who will believe. And Lord, I believe.

"I also confess the times I have not trusted you. I have held onto my stuff with too tightly. I have not allowed your generous spirit to flow through me as it should. Please forgive me for my stinginess and lack of trust.

"I declare a freedom in living, as I begin to experience the joy of giving. With your help, I will honor you with the stuff I have and the stuff I get. You are Lord of it all. No longer will I shy away from bold and crazy generosity. I will be someone you can depend on to touch others in your name.

"Praise God! With you, all things are possible. And I'm with you!"

For additional posts and books, please follow me at <http://janrace.com> Thank you.