

GENEROUS – THE GENEROUS CHURCH

WEEK 3

LEAD OFF

Probably one of the most humbling things as a pastor is watching people in the church make sacrifices to advance the Kingdom and in particular the church you pastor.

- I don't know how to describe the feeling.
- It's a sense of knowing that people love this place as much as you do.
- It's a confirmation that God is moving and doing great things.
- These acts of generosity remind me that it takes a community, a village to move God's plan forward.
 - And that's the way he wants it.
 - He wants all of us working together for the betterment of the church and of Republic

STORIES

Over Christmas break someone messaged me and was eager to tell me their story.

- This person had pledged a certain amount of money to the giving campaign that was a decision of faith for them.
- They said that money was a little tight this time of year, but they felt that what they had settled on was what they felt led to contribute.
- Over the holidays this person received an amount of cash for Christmas that totaled the exact amount they had pledged to the giving campaign.
 - And this person, as practicing generosity requires, didn't automatically assume that everything that was put into their lap was for their consumption, knew that this is what God wanted for them to pass it along.

We had another person that is actually a teenager here at the church.

- The teenager asked his parents to take back his Christmas gifts and not purchase anymore, but instead to put those funds towards the building.
- This young person gave up their Christmas to do what they felt God was leading them to do.
- I dare you to try and out give that teenager! I dare myself.
- How many of you know that generosity is not the zeroes on the end of a paycheck, but rather the level of sacrifice required

These people, and everyone else... you're not just investing in a building to put up walls, you're investing in souls. You're investing in changed lives. You're investing in a resource that will make the community better.

RECAP OF SERIES

So far in our series we've looked at a Generous God

- We've looked at the reality that God owns everything in Heaven and on earth.
- He's allowed us to be temporary managers of resources such as time, money, energy, stuff, talents, and knowledge.
 - He lets us manage for three reasons
 - He wants us to be a conduit of blessing for others
 - He wants to be a conduit of blessing to us
 - He wants to test our obedience
 - Will we handle God's things the way he wants us to.
- Generosity is being open to moving God's things to the places he wants us to move them to.
 - Generosity is not a do, it's a be.
 - It's not a random string of emotional responses to giving opportunities, it's a life style, a pattern of living.
- Week 1 we answered the What and Why
- Last week Pastor Billy answered the How in living a Generous life, in that if we align ourselves spiritually with God by examining our mind, heart, eyes, etc... we will automatically generate the capacity and heart to be generosity cause we will strive to be like the Father.

Today we are looking at what it would take to be a Generous Church.

THE POWER OF GENEROSITY

The Power of Generosity is really seen when we hear and tell stories of individuals that respond to God's leading, but can you imagine that power when it's pulled together in one massive effort? Can you image the impact and the power that comes from an entire community experiencing the power of selflessness and generosity.

The Power of Generosity is multiplied exponentially people pull together to accomplish something. It's the power of generosity in community.

We have a great example of this in Scripture from how the church behaved and operated when it was first coming together after Jesus departed Earth in Acts 2. They operated in a very unique way, but they had unique circumstances.

To give you context...

- It was the day of Pentecost and thousands of people were gathered and listening to Peter (yeah the guy we talked about a couple of months ago that couldn't get out of his own way) preach a sermon that got 3,000 people saved
- There were people from all parts of the world gathered in one spot.
- After they were converted they began baptizing those new converts.
- Well these people from other parts of the world really didn't go back home right away.
 - They stayed around and devoted themselves to the apostles' teachings

- So we are presented in this environment with TWO logistical problems and ONE common misunderstanding about this scenario.

Acts 2:42-47 ESV

42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

WHAT IS REALLY GOING ON HERE?

I want to take a second to setup the scene on what's going on here.

- I want to practice what's called sound hermeneutics.
 - Hermeneutics is a fancy theological term for Biblical interpretation.
 - So let's get all of the data and historical context together and look at this with proper perspective, because when we do it will laid the ground work for us in becoming a generous church.

TWO LOGISTICAL PROBLEMS

LOGISTICAL PROBLEM #1

- Think about the logistics of their situation, especially for leadership.
- You have thousands of people gathered, many of them from other scattered areas of the world.
 - They all just got saved and baptized, and they don't want to go home!
- They want to stick around and learn from the disciples more about Christ.
 - What happens when you got to vacation on a budget and you stay longer than expected?
 - You run out of money.
 - You have lots of people that are far away from their homes that need resources.
 - So what does the church do?
 - Out of generosity they liquidate their assets so those people can stick around and be taught by the apostles.

LOGISTICAL PROBLEM #2

Here is what you also have... in the context of this society... to be a Christian meant you were signing up to join a cult.

- Hard for us to imagine in the Bible belt that Christianity was ever regarded as a cult, but in their world it was.

- To claim to follow Christ meant excommunication from your social groups and abandonment by your family.
- Often Christians were thrown out of their homes with nothing to survive on.
- So the people in the church that had resources didn't consider their resources to be their own, but rather God's... and they determined that their best way to handle that reality was liquidate their assets so the new believers would have something to eat and somewhere to live.

ONE COMMON MISUNDERSTANDING

Let's start with what is not happening here:

- The Christians were selling all of their property and turning it over to the church, meaning they all basically lived in a commune together
 - a. Well doesn't it say... and had all things in common? Doesn't this mean they practiced "community ownership?"

What we have here as you move from the Greek to English language is you have some high marked imperfect tense verbs that seem to indicate a "once-and-for-all" action in historical narrative.

44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common.

- i. In reality it's not a once-and-for-all action or sell of property, but periodic acts of charity as needs arose.

Let's look at a verse in Acts 4 that is still referencing this behavior and we will get a more clear look at what's going on.

Acts 4:33b-35 NIV

And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all 34 that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales 35 and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

Not only that, but if we go back to our original verse we see something there too:

Acts 2:42-47 ESV

42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Both of these statements indicate this was done as there was need, not as a once-and-for all type of system. In addition, they still had homes that they met in. So this is proof that they didn't sell everything all at once.

On five different occasions we are told that they "were together" (Acts 1:15; 2:1, 44, 47; and 4:31). This statement gives us insight into the unity and intimacy characteristic of the early church. This emphasis is made more emphatic by the statement that they "had everything in common" (Acts 2:44). This statement does not mean that they practiced community ownership, as is made clear by the indication that they continued to meet from house to house (Acts 2:46). Nonetheless, it does underline the incredible generosity indicated by the willingness to sell property and possession, and distribute the proceeds to those who had needs. The verb tense here indicates that the practice of selling and sharing was a recurrent and continuing practice -- it was the norm, not the exception. The other thing was the fact that nobody regarded his property as being under his own control but was prepared to regard it as for the use of the community as a whole. This way of putting the matter brings out the fact that the things which each person possessed evidently continued to be his own property until it was found necessary to sell them for the common good.

Marshall, I. H. (1980). Acts: an introduction and commentary (Vol. 5, p. 115). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

TWO INGREDIENTS THAT MADE THE EARLY CHURCH GENEROUS

1. THE EARLY CHURCH OPERATED IN UNITY

Acts 4:32 NIV

32 All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.

This was possible because of what Pastor Billy preached last week...

- They were able to be of one heart and one mind, because they were all in alignment with the Father.
- When all of us are in alignment with the Father and what he wants to accomplish through this Church, we will all naturally be of one heart and one mind.
 - None of us seeking what we can benefit from anything, but seeking what we can contribute
 - Time, money, resources, stuff, talent, knowledge
 - We all say... whatever I can do or offer or provide, I'm in for.

Notice the result of a community of believers that were in unity...

Acts 2:46-48 NIV

46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor

with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

They grew! God drew more people to himself, because unity is attractive.

- Everyone desires a place that is home, a place where they don't have to pretend to be someone they're not.
- They desire a place to belong.
- But they also desire a place to contribute, to have skin in the game, to be able to invest.... because that's when you take ownership.

This is my church. These are my people. This is what we do. This is why we do what we do.

2. THE EARLY CHURCH DEVOTED THEMSELVES TO IMPORTANT THINGS

Acts 2:42 NIV

42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

They devoted themselves to:

- **Going to church and learning**
 - This is what we commit ourselves to each Sunday night
 - This is what we do in our community groups
 - Started Deeper this week
 - 14 participants eager to go Deeper with God that will be journaling and doing assignments
- **Fellowship or building community with other believers**
- **Breaking of Bread – Man, they committed themselves to eating... how fun is that right?**
 - Giant Potlucks, Ice Cream Socials, Dip Bars
- **Prayers – Not the most fun or exciting thing on the list, but the most essential and powerful**
 - This is why Tawana comes in early each Sunday and prays for about 45 minutes before service
 - This is why we have a FB group dedicated just to prayer needs
 - We need to dedicate ourselves to pray

These are the important things... the things Heaven cares about

GENEROUS CHURCHES ARE POWERFUL

There is no force in the world that can stop a generous church.

- A group of people that don't consider their resources as their own
- A group of people that consider the needs of others
- A group of people bless over accumulate
- A group of people that voluntarily give of themselves

You may hear that and think it's impossible, but it's not. Acts shows us that it can be accomplished.

My heart's desire is that people see New Life Republic and think... wow that's a generous church.

- They give of themselves
- They empty themselves to make others better.

OUR PLAN

So here is what we will do this year in 2018 as we seek to become a generous church.

- I want to set a goal over this year that we can donate \$5,000 to church planting
 - I want to invest in the same organizations that helped us get off the ground running.
- I want to set a goal to help at least 30 people that are down on their luck.
- I want to pick up our first missionary in monthly support.
- I want to volunteer 1,000 volunteer hours.

Will you pray with me that 2018 we are generoUS.

- That as a church we will take this amazing journey of giving back, and we can sit back and watch what God will do in and through us.
- It's not something we will do, it's something we will be.