

Generosity

Proverbs 14:31

Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is generous to the needy honors him.

A Persian proverb says, “Every man goes down to his death bearing in his hands only that which he has given away.”

The Merriam Webster student dictionary describes generosity as: “freedom in spirit or act; especially: readiness in giving”

Hello, my name is Barbara Shantz. In this second of our video series on Faith Reliance, we’re going to talk about generosity and how *anyone and everyone* can be generous.

To be certain, in God’s economy, if you take the instructions about giving out of the Bible, there would be giant gaps throughout the books. More particularly, if you took giving out of the life of Christ, who is both an example and sacrifice for us, it is possible that there would be no Gospel at all.

In Step One of this Faith Reliance series, we talked about, our lifelong goals as believers needing to center on multiplying disciples as we join God’s cross-cultural mission in this world. But who should fund these cross-cultural ministries. Is *everyone* required to give? What about the poor? Surely they are excused from giving when there are so many wealthy people who could give an extra share? Isn’t the expectation different for people in different situations?

For example, to some people, taking an airplane is about as common as taking a bus, whereas to many others, even taking a bus would be a special event. People in one part of the world run more clean water while brushing their teeth than people in another part of the world even have available to them in a week. Worse, some people throw as much leftover food into the garbage every day as would feed an entire family for a week somewhere else in the world. But the extraordinary thing is, the Bible points out countless stories of generosity so pointedly that we can be sure every believer, no matter what their economic stature, is meant to pay attention.

In 1 Chronicles 29:14-17 we read about King David and his people gladly bringing their resources together to build a temple to the Lord God:

“But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to thus offer willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you. For we are strangers before you and sojourners, as all our fathers were. Our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no abiding. O Lord our God, all this abundance that we have provided for building you a house for your holy name comes from your hand and is all your own. I know, my God, that you test the heart and have pleasure in uprightness. In the uprightness of my heart I have freely offered all these things, and now I have seen your people, who are present here, offering freely and joyously to you.”

Each story of generosity in Scripture is fascinating as it is usually filled with joyful giving that reveals the glad participation in the purposes of God, who extends His Kingdom with the gifts that He’s given us in the first place! In the New Testament, however, is a favourite example of generosity.

In Mark 12: 41-44 we see Jesus watching people put their money into the offering box and noticing that a poor widow put in all that she had. He did *not* run up to her and say, “Lady – that’s all you have! Here, take it back and let me give on your behalf.” No.

“And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. And he called his disciples to him and said, “Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

Jesus wanted us to know *this* kind of giving. He used this widow as a model of generosity! Certainly the rich were obligated to give, but the dignity of giving was not only a prerogative of the rich. This woman was practicing what the dictionary defines as “freedom in spirit or act; especially: readiness in giving.”

Let’s try to imagine why she gave. It did not seem to be for her own credit, because if anyone else was watching, her pitiful gift would probably be more embarrassing than impressive. It doesn’t appear that she was expecting a payday the next day so that she could afford to give everything today.

I think that we can suppose that the reason the poor widow gave was out of a desire to do her part in supplying the need of God's Kingdom. It might even have been a matter of pride that she could walk by the offering box alongside the rich. Actually, given her situation, she could have been one of the women begging at the temple gates, but that was not her style. Her plan was to give generously to her Lord and God. This is where, as we say in English, the rubber meets the road in our faith. It's where forward motion begins as we decide to throw in our lot in the journey along the Great Commission road together.

International Steward, a ministry that promotes local fundraising, has provided a chart that explains why many people give. As you look at this chart, where would the poor widow be? Where would you be? The journey of the Great Commission needs those who are mature givers, understanding God's greater purposes of giving in obedience and worship. I'm sure that the widow and you are "theocentric" givers, giving in a way that others would simply not understand.

The more we understand giving, the less likely we are to ask who has the most when determining how God's ministry will be funded. Clearly He does not differentiate between the wealthy and the poor but looks at the heart, and there our attitude tells Him where our greatest concerns lie. In this way, we can privately examine our own giving.

The Lausanne Movement's Global Generosity Network has created a Generosity Declaration which individuals and organisations can consider and then choose whether to sign. It summarizes a global believer's call to Great Commission giving. The declaration begins with an affirmation of the signers' commitment to biblical-based generosity.

We affirm that:

- God is indescribably generous. We see this in his creation and experience it in his redemption plan through the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ (John 3:16).
- God is creator, sustainer and owner of all things (Psalm 24:1). He has supplied His infinite resources to us to steward for His Kingdom purposes, including to reach the ends of the earth for the glory of His name (Luke 12:42-48; Revelation 7:9-12).
- Just as Jesus lived a truly and perfectly generous life to serve and save people (Mark 10:45, 2 Corinthians 9:8-9), it remains fundamental that Christians model biblical service, generosity and stewardship (Mark 10:45, 1 Corinthians 4:1, 2 Corinthians 9:8-9)

We, therefore, commit ourselves to foster a culture of biblical generosity and stewardship that will transform individuals and communities as we:

- Recognize that generosity is made manifest in giving funds, resources, time, talents, gifts, prayer and our very presence.
- Practice holistic stewardship, generous living, and gracious financial giving while encouraging these virtues within our spheres of influence through modeling, teaching and equipping.
- Engage openly with other Christians and their networks in a global movement in which the whole church lives out and takes the whole gospel to the whole world as effective and generous stewards.

You can sign and promote this declaration at: www.generositymovement.org The Generosity Network has a long form of the declaration that includes the following points. How could you and others give generously by embracing these concepts?

1. Stewardship and generosity can and should be primary focal points and themes in discipleship for a vibrant and holistic church. The impact of generosity is enhanced as each Christ-follower is educated and equipped as a good financial steward of all God's resources.
2. Generosity is not synonymous with tithing. The practice of tithing can assist people toward a mindset and lifestyle of generosity.
3. Generosity is a primary indicator of our understanding of our role as stewards of God's creation (Matthew 6:21).
4. Generosity is not limited to tangible resources and money but is best understood as an extension of all God has entrusted to our care – that is life, breath, relationships, roles, skills, time, grace and so on. (1 Corinthians 4:1)

On the Faith Reliance Web page, www.twr.org/faith-reliance you can see a list of books, videos and articles pertinent to this second step we've been taking together regarding Faith Reliance in ministry. Any comments, questions or critiques are welcome at faith-reliance@twr.org

The next video in this series deals with the topic "Accountability" I look forward to seeing you there!