

GENEROSITY

GOD LOVES CHEERFUL GIVERS

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Only a few years after my conversion, I fell into a trap common for new converts: the trap of morbid introspection. The joy of receiving new life in Christ quickly gave way to despair in my pursuit of holiness. I was burdened by my lack of growth and despaired the presence of sin that remained in my life. Despite experiencing the grace of God in Christ only a few years prior, I was miserable.

The main instrument God used to deliver me from my despair was a small book many of us are familiar with, *The Cross Centered Life* by C.J. Mahaney. God used this book as a key to unlock the door in the room of despair. I realized that, while trusting the gospel for my salvation, I was not living according to that same gospel. I discovered that I needed the gospel daily. This small book proved to be huge in helping me apply the gospel to my growth in Christ.

I soon realized that the Christian life is meant to be marked by gratitude and joy, not gloom and despair. I understood that following our Lord was a delight, not a mere duty. I found that, because of the cross, we can be happy in our sanctification though never satisfied with our present degree of conformity to Christ.

One surprising effect of my new application of the gospel was the joy that I discovered through generosity. Once a greedy, covetous, and selfish man, the gospel taught me that it is truly more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). In short, I came to realize that gospel people are generous people. We delight in generosity because God has been incomprehensibly generous to us.

Since joining Sovereign Grace in 2015 through the church adoption process, I have been amazed at the abundant generosity that is consistently on display through our churches. In what follows, I hope to outline what I believe are the motives of this expression and how we can continue to pursue a gospel-fueled generosity together.

The Motivation for Generosity

Gospel people are generous people because the gospel displays God's generosity in unfathomable ways. We have been redeemed from our sins and the eternal judgment they deserve because God is generous. He gave generously, joyfully, and sacrificially. He gave his own Son, who in turn gave his own life to rescue us from our sins. This overwhelming generosity is at the heart of one of the Bible's most famous verses: "For God so

loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

God gave so that we would receive. As we marvel at his generosity toward us, we are transformed into his image, with large and generous hearts. Consider these words from Charles Spurgeon:

Now, the Lord is the most cheerful of all givers. I want you to think of that for a minute. “Who spared not his own Son.” Oh, what a gift was that! Mothers, could you give your sons? Fathers, could you spare your children? Well, yes, perhaps you might for your country, but you could not for your enemies. But God, the cheerful giver, spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, as saith the word. And since then what a cheerful giver he has been! He has given without our asking. We did not ask him to make the covenant of grace. We did not ask him to elect us. We did not ask him to redeem us. These things were done before we were born. We did not ask him to call us by his grace, for, alas! We did not know the value of that call, and we were dead in trespasses and sins, but he gave to us freely of his unsought, but boundless love.²⁸

True generosity is not motivated by guilt or even by need. True generosity is motivated by the gospel of grace as it grips our hearts while we behold the incomprehensible generosity of God. His generosity is spoken of again in 2 Corinthians 8:9, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.” Jesus became poor (Luke 9:58) so that we might become infinitely rich in grace.

Stories and pictures of the broken, abused, neglected, and poor (especially children!) may move tender hearts toward generosity, but nothing transforms a stingy heart more than considering our broken and bleeding Savior, crucified for us. We become generous as we are amazed by our own salvation. The first place we look to motivate our generosity is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Randy Alcorn said it this way: “Gaze upon Christ long enough, and you’ll become more of a giver. Give long enough, and you’ll become more like Christ.”²⁹

The Joy of Generosity

The gospel not only inspires the action of generosity, but also inspires the manner of generosity. By his grace, God replaces begrudging generosity with joy-filled giving. God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:7) and he gives us grace so that we can do what he loves! (2 Cor. 8:1)

²⁸ Charles Spurgeon, “A Cheerful Giver Beloved of God,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons, vol. 14* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1868), 573.

²⁹ Randy Alcorn, *The Treasure Principle* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2001), 30.

The apostle Paul gives us an example of joy-filled generosity in 2 Corinthians 8. There, he is challenging the church in Corinth by the example of the church in Macedonia. Paul was eager to support the saints in Jerusalem as they suffered in poverty and was calling upon fellow Christians elsewhere to contribute to their financial need. Paul wanted the church in Jerusalem's needs to be met through the giving of the Corinthians and others.

In an effort to solicit their support, Paul tells the Corinthians about the support that was given from the church in Macedonia. He says, in 2 Corinthians 8:1-4,

We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints.

The Macedonians, while facing severe tests of affliction and extreme poverty, gave generously. Notice the manner of their giving as well, they had an abundance of joy as they gave. They were so cheerful in their giving that they begged the apostle to let them give. We might have looked at this church and said, "No, don't you worry about giving. You have needs of your own." But they insisted on giving and were joyful about it.

God cares deeply about our motivations in generosity. He does not want us to give out of compulsion, guilt, or pride. He wants us to delight in giving. God delights in hearts that delight to give. Hearts that have been transformed by the gospel are transformed all the way down to the affections that prompt joyful, selfless generosity.

The Reward of Generosity

God is so delighted when his people give cheerfully that he rewards their joy by enabling them to give even more! Imagine an investment that always yields a fruitful return; this is what joyful generosity is like. God rewards our generosity with a supply that enables us to give more.

Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will be bursting with wine
(Prov. 3:9-10).

Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will repay him for his deed (Prov. 19:17).

As I write this article, the farmers in Nebraska are preparing for planting season. Equipment is being prepared, fertilizer is being sprayed, and rain is being prayed for. In mid-April, our farmers will be laboring

in their fields to plant seed that will be harvested, Lord willing, in October. This is a critical time for our farmers because their livelihoods depend on the coming harvest this fall.

Paul uses this farming illustration to teach the Corinthians about generosity in 2 Corinthians 9. He says, “The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully” (2 Cor. 9:6). This is a simple equation for agriculture: if you sow a little seed this April you will reap a little harvest this fall. If you sow bountifully, you will also reap bountifully.

When we consider our own generosity, we are tempted to approach it like an accountant. We wonder how much it will cost us to give and measure our giving in light of our personal needs or the needs of our family. John Calvin warns us about this in his commentary on 2 Corinthians 8.

For what makes us more close-handed than we ought to be is—when we look too carefully, and too far forward, in contemplating the dangers that may occur—when we are excessively cautious and careful—when we calculate too narrowly what we will require during our whole life, or, in fine, how much we lose when the smallest portion is taken away. The man, that depends upon the blessing of the Lord, has his mind set free from these trammels, and has, at the same time, his hands opened for beneficence.³⁰

When we focus our concerns on our temporary or future needs to determine our generosity, we fail to realize that God will supply all our needs. He has a higher goal in mind than just meeting our needs. He will provide so that we will have all that we need and opportunity to continue our generous giving.

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. As it is written, ‘He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.’ He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. (2 Cor. 9:8–11)

Theologian Charles Hodge said,

The main idea the apostle designs to present as having the sanction of the word of God is, that he who is liberal, who disperses, scatters abroad his gifts with free-handed generosity, as a man scatters seed, shall always have abundance.³¹

³⁰ John Calvin and John Pringle, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians, vol. 2* (Bellingham: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 285–286.

³¹ Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 597.

Our reward extends beyond our return as well. The additional, and primary reward is the praise of God that our generosity elicits.

You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. (2 Cor. 9:11–14)

The result of our generosity is not just that needs will be met, missionary endeavors are funded, or buildings are built. Giving generously promotes gratitude towards God and brings glory to him!

Living Generously

With gratitude in our hearts and promises in our hands, we can travel the road of joyful and abundant generosity. Because of what Christ has done and the promises he offers to us, the entirety of our lives should be marked by generosity. A generous heart not only impacts our bank accounts, but our time and talents as well.

When I accepted the call to be a pastor in Nebraska, my young family moved from our home and extended families in Alabama, one thousand miles away. Since we arrived, a dear lady from our church insisted on watching our children (now 4 of them) regularly (for free!) so that Meredith and I can enjoy a date night. Another family invites us to their home every Easter so that we will not spend that day alone. These families are rich in good works (2 Tim. 6:18). They are generous with their time and talents.

Hospitality, counsel, sharing, and many other expressions of love require generosity. God rewards and is praised by all of them.

We should be eager to do good to everyone, and especially those in the household of faith (Gal. 6:10). Do not grow weary in it; God will reward you in due time (Gal. 6:9).

Let me encourage you with several ways that you can experience the joy of generosity.

1. Fix your heart on Christ. Remember that he was born, broken, buried, and raised for you. By his wounds you have been healed. You are born again because God is generous (Eph. 2:4–5).

2. Be rich in good works. Serve others. Find ways to serve your church. Be hospitable. Do good to those in need (Prov. 3:27–28).

3. Give when it seems unreasonable. Be sacrificial. Do not let your circumstances hinder your generosity. Give when it seems impossible (2 Cor. 8:2–3).

4. Support your church's mission. Give so that churches can be planted through Sovereign Grace (Rom. 15:24).

Conclusion

I am so thankful to call Sovereign Grace Churches my home. I am indebted to the gospel centrality that I have learned from men in Sovereign Grace. I have been the beneficiary of enormous generosity in our partnership. May the legacy laid before us continue, with hearts full of gratitude to God and hands open with generosity toward others.