

A Culture of Generosity (Part 1)

In **Acts 20:35**, Paul quoting Jesus: *"In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"*

The natural tendency for a human being is to feel blessed when they receive a gift. However, by implication Jesus is suggesting that the giver of the gift has more reason to make the statement that they are blessed. Jesus was challenging our mentality and He was helping us to renew our minds so that we have the Kingdom mindset that it is more blessed to give than to receive. This applies to all kinds of giving, whether you are giving a compliment or giving a financial gift.

Definition of generosity

Tob = pleasant, agreeable, good-looking, better (75 times), cheerful

Eumetadotos = ready to impart, willingly sharing, open-handedly, ease and promptitude (element of spontaneity).

If I was told that if I get mealie seeds and planted them in green soil, the seeds will turn into gold; my natural reaction would be to ensure that I have mealie seeds and every day I would be looking for green soil. Therefore, if Jesus says it is more blessed to give than to receive, as Christians, the natural reaction would be to figure out and master how to give the right way.

Proverbs 21:26 shows us one of the ways to give correctly: *"All day long he craves for more, but the righteous give without sparing."*

You cannot separate righteousness from giving and generosity. Be careful if you are naturally risk averse. Two people can give the same amount but one does very cheerfully whilst the other struggled because of fear of lack.

James 1:17

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

God Himself is a giver and therefore we should master the art of giving. Amy Carmichael the great minister of the gospel once said;

"You can give without loving but you cannot love without giving"

Winston Churchill once said:

"We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give."

Your giving defines you and is a determining factor in what your life will look like. Some of the crossroads people are experiencing right now will depend on their willingness to give.

Your brand is determined by your giving of your time, talent and treasure. We know you by what you invest in, spiritually, socially and financially.

Be careful of giving like a robot who has discovered a formula they can automate. Make sure there is always love in it.

Mother Teresa said:

“It’s not how much we give but how much love we put into our giving”

God is calling us to be uncommon Christians that do more than others. We need to be uncommon in our giving. I have identified attributes of generous people. These attributes are different from the average Christian givers who are generally lukewarm. As we go through these, highlight the ones you need to work on. God wants us to be distinguished in these things.

Matthew 5:46-48 Jesus says: ⁴⁶*“If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?”* ⁴⁷*And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?”* ⁴⁸*Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”*

Please note what Jesus is challenging us to do here despite our personalities.

Proverbs 28:27 says: *those who give to the poor will lack nothing but those who close their eyes to them receive many curses.*

This verse is to encourage us to go the extra-mile even to people who are not our family or friends. This does not mean that you should give to everyone on the street. Rather, there is need for strategic giving to the poor. It is interesting that this is not a nice to have but there are negative consequences to stinginess.

Deuteronomy 15:7

“If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites in any of the towns of the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward them.”

There are things that harden our hearts. We need to deal with these things. Were you once tender-hearted but something has since changed? What changed you? Were you taken advantage of or was your good nature abused? Do you now have rigid boundaries? When you see that the opportunity to give is to your advantage you will stop ranking people to see if they qualify for you to give to them. You will overlook certain things because you are desperate for your giving to be registered in heaven. If we want to create a culture of generosity we must define it clearly. There are things generous people do differently. Do an honest generosity audit on yourself.

1. Generous People Give Completely

Malachi 3:10

“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.”

When you give, whether it is through tithes or offerings, is there complete obedience to ensure that your giving is not sparingly but completely generous? The God who is more than enough is calling us to give completely. When you do so, it shows that you trust God and instead of partial obedience, there is full obedience. I remember the Lord challenging me at a time when I went to do some grocery shopping. The shopping was for an orphanage and I was using the same amount of money that I had used the previous year which meant that it was less money because of inflation. Instead of being impressed with myself, I was challenged to give more. As business people we increase our rates from time to time. Do we have the same mindset in our giving?

2. Generous People Give What They Owe

The Bible says in **Romans 13:8**: *“Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law.”*

It is not God’s will for us to always be owing. The generous person seeks to pay off what they owe people. It’s ungodly to be selectively generous where we give to the poor but we do not give what we owe our Christian brothers. If you owe someone, come up with a payment plan or confront the people you owe and work out a plan to reduce the debt. How do they feel when they see you giving a sacrificial offering but not willing to pay them what you owe? How do you feel when someone owes you money but they are happily taking their family to exotic places for lavish holidays. We want to create a generous culture that’s embedded in meeting our obligations.

3. Generous People Give to the Poor

Matthew 19:21

Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

Jesus endorsed giving to the poor, but He did not leave it there. He showed that it’s possible to give to the poor but not follow Jesus. Giving to the poor results in the building up of treasures in heaven.

Proverbs 28:27

“Those who give to the poor will lack nothing, but those who close their eyes to them receive many curses.”

Deuteronomy 15:7 again speaks concerning the poor: *“If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites in any of the towns of the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward them.”*

How you are to the poor is a reflection of your heart attitude. Are you hard-hearted? There are things in life that harden the heart. As you can see, God wants us to give to the poor. In order to be intentional in your giving, it is important to have a strategy for helping the poor. You can adopt an orphanage. You can pay school fees for a child that is not your own. You can give a monthly amount to the Go Outreach Programme to feed a family. Remember that there is always someone else worse off than you. When you are in a victim mindset you become dependent on people and develop an entitlement mentality. This attitude suppresses generosity. Don’t be perfectionist in your giving. Some people stop giving because they have an unreasonably high standard with regards to how much it should be. Generous people give what they can, and when it is only a little there is no shame.

4. Generous People Give Freely

If you love with a hook, you are the kind of person who loves people expecting to get something in return from them. It’s called love with a hook. The command in **Exodus 22:25** is *“If you lend money to one of my people among you who is needy, do not treat it like a business deal; charge no interest.”*

Here, we are being told not to treat it as a business deal which also translates to not expecting anything in return. If you bless someone in church, do not do that so that you will gain respect from that person. Do not do it to control how they will be towards you.

The same is also said in **Deuteronomy 23:19** *“Do not charge a fellow Israelite interest, whether on money or food or anything else that may earn interest.”*

Our giving should not be used to control people's behaviour and attitude towards us.

5. Generous People are Unselfish

1 Timothy 6:17-18

¹⁷*“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. ¹⁸Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.”*

Unselfishness is tested at home. Some kids that have no siblings have to learn to share when they are older. Children can be selfish and unwilling to share such that when you ask them even for a small portion of a treat you bought them, they can be stingy. When my sons were younger, I would ask them for some chips that I had bought them. Funny enough, they would give me the tiniest chip possible just so that they could say they have given. Evidently, their desire was not to share. What they forgot as soon as they got the chips was that I was the one who had bought them, but they still struggled to share with the giver! If someone asks you for something, is your mentality to give them just the bare minimum because your heart is full of stinginess or do you have a generous heart? We are often like that with God when it comes to tithes and offerings. Even as adults, sharing is a sign of maturity. Unselfishness is learned and modelled. It is not about your personality.

Deuteronomy 15:9-10

⁹*“Be careful not to harbour this wicked thought: “The seventh year, the year for cancelling debts, is near,” so that you do not show ill will toward the needy among your fellow Israelites and give them nothing. They may then appeal to the Lord against you, and you will be found guilty of sin. ¹⁰Give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to.”*

Your mentality should be that even when people owe you, there is a space and time to release those debts. You can always see it as sowing into someone's life instead of spending the next fifteen years grumbling over it. There are certain people God is calling you to release because of what they owe you. It is not just talking about money, but it could also be other aspects such as relational or emotional experiences. I am not saying that you can never ask for what people owe you but there is a time and place for asking and a time to let go. Some marriages unfortunately have become debt based where a spouse may do certain acts meaning that the person benefiting owes the giver. “You owe me one.” Unlike this type of service, the God kind of love (agape) is the type of love that gives without expecting anything in return. Jesus came to the earth and lovingly gave His life for the world but many in the world have not reciprocated that love. Jesus continues to love them anyway. Give generously to people and do so without a grudging heart and the Lord will bless you. One of the reasons why certain people's lives are so blessed is that they have a generous heart toward people. Be careful of only meditating on the good you have done for your spouse (or church, friends etc) and forgetting about what they have done for you.

In all our giving let's remember that the harvest is always bigger than the sacrifice. We can never out-give God.