

Title: Generosity-ville
Date: June 12, 2022
Subject: We gain happiness when we are generous.
Scripture: Acts 20:32 - 37

Our cruise down the happiness highway takes us to Generosity-ville. Researchers discovered that people who give money and time to others are happier than those who don't. One psychologist concluded, "Let's stop thinking about giving as a moral obligation, and start thinking of it as a source of pleasure."

The psychologist's and researchers' concepts of happiness probably don't exactly mesh with what the Bible says. Their focus is likely on the temporary emotion and feeling, pleasing oneself. Our focus is on the deeper meaning of happiness -- spiritual wholeness and well-being and the blessing God gives. Part of the reason we give is because there's a moral obligation. We're stewards who are responsible to manage what God has given to us. We desire to please him. The Bible also assures us there's blessing connected with giving.

Read Acts 20:32 - 37.

V. 35 is one of the few direct quotes by Jesus outside of the biblical historical accounts. Apparently, there was a collection of these sayings in the first century.

Jesus fulfilled his statement. He considered it more blessed to give than to receive. God is a giver. We see this in his actions of generosity. Another Scripture tells us: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so you through his poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9).

In his pre-earthly existence as the Son of God, Jesus was rich in every imaginable way. He was the creator of the entire universe. He owned it all. He possessed every good character trait and attribute. He was in a right relationship with God. There wasn't any separation between him and the Father.

Jesus' giving is supremely shown by him leaving heaven to come to earth so he could die for our sins. Though he was rich, He divested himself of his riches. God became a man. As the song says: "He gave his life, what more could he give? Oh how He loves you and me."

He alone gives what we didn't have and couldn't gain by ourselves. He gives the right, the ability to be in a right relationship with God. He transforms us from poverty-stricken beggars without hope into co-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17). He has "blessed in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ...In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will - to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the one he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Ephesians 1:3 - 7). This was all done in accordance with the riches of God's grace he lavished on us (Ephesians 1:7, 8).

The Savior's teachings follow the pattern of his life. He emphasizes the need for his followers to be generous. One day Jesus observed people putting money into the temple treasury. It would be deposited into

one of thirteen wooden chests with bronze funnels called trumpets leading into them. Coins going through metal make a lot of noise. Jesus saw the rich give large amounts, likely giving their coins a good fling so they'd hit the metal and bounce around. The noise would alert fellow worshippers to their sizable donation.

There was also a poor woman. She only had two very small copper coins, the smallest in circulation. They were sometimes called "thin pieces." They were worth about 1/40th of a day's wage, what a person gets for twelve minutes of work. They'd make little sound, even if she had the arm of a Major League pitcher and could zing them in. I don't think she did that. In her humility she simply gently placed them in the trumpet and they probably didn't make much of a clink.

Jesus made this a teaching opportunity: "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; But she came out of her poverty, put in everything - all she had to live on" (Mark 12:43, 44). The woman was praised for her generous attitude.

Generosity insight: generosity is measured by what we have not by what we don't have. A person who says they'll wait to be generous until they're uber rich when they can afford it, doesn't have a generous attitude or spirit and probably never will be generous.

Gordon Cosby served as pastor in Washington, DC. A widow in the church was barely able to feed and clothe her six children yet every week she faithfully put money in the offering plate. One of the deacons suggested Cosby talk to her and assure her that her family would benefit from the money far more than the church. The pastor followed the deacon's advice...to his regret. The widow told him, "You are trying to take away the last thing that gives me dignity and meaning." Phillip Yancey comments about the situation: "She had learned a key to giving: it can benefit the giver more than the receiver. Yes, those in poverty need financial help. But the need to give may be as important as the need to receive" (Phillip Yancey, *Our Daily Bread*).

Generosity is often linked to the financial but there are other aspects of generosity. When Jesus instructed the 12 disciples prior to a witnessing tour, He told them, "Freely you have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8). They were to give out what they knew about Jesus as they were going with the good news.

Generosity is also linked with time, resources, abilities, love, relationships, skills, spiritual gifts, as well as possessions and money. All of them are gifts on loan from God. We accept them with profound gratitude and are to maintain an accountable attitude.

We can also look at the example of the apostle Paul. This Scripture was part of his farewell to the people of Ephesus. It's the only message in Acts delivered to a Christian group. He spent more time there than any city on his mission journeys with the exception of maybe Rome - if his time for being imprisoned for his faith in Christ is counted. During three years in Ephesus Paul grew close to the people. Now he communicated that he'd never see them again. He recalled his life among them, how he served the Lord with humility and tears as he encountered trials. He measured his success by faithfulness (Acts 20:20, 21, 24, 27).

In verse 33 Paul declares he wasn't covetous of money or clothing which would represent status. He didn't succumb to greed (1 Thessalonians 2:5). Covetousness is the opposite of generosity.

Generosity insight: life isn't about what we can gain for ourselves. It's not what we can get or should get if people were paying attention. It's not about what we can amass and accumulate. It's about what we give.

In vv. 34 and 35 he stresses how hard he'd worked. This is part of his generous spirit that allowed him to give of himself to others. He used his skill as a tentmaker to provide for his needs (Acts 18:3).

He worked hard in spite of possessing the right to receive help from churches so he wouldn't need to work for a living. He could have been like other men who traveled to share the Gospel of Jesus (1 Corinthians 9:4 – 14; 2 Thessalonians 3:9). He asked why he and Barnabas should be treated differently than the other messengers. He wrote of those who reap the benefit from their position - a soldier, vineyard owner, shepherd, ox, the worker at the temple. "The worker deserves his wages" (1 Timothy 5:18).

Paul worked hard for three purposes. He desired to supply his own needs while the fledgling churches were forming. He didn't take advantage of others or his position. In another place he wrote: "We worked night and day" in order not to be a burden (2 Thessalonians 3:7 - 9).

The second reason was to help meet the needs of people. The churches were composed of a mixture of people. Some were Jews. Some weren't. Some were well off. Some were poor and there widows for whom the church was to provide.

The third purpose. Paul desired to set an example so the people of the churches would get the picture. They were to be busy providing for their needs, those of people in the church body and those who weren't yet followers of Jesus Christ. He condemned idle loafers and commanded that they get to work.

This point is driven home in another place and proper punctuation. It's incredibly important as shown by the sentence "Women are pretty...comma...generally speaking." Pull out the comma and we get "Women are pretty generally speaking." That's not my view so don't shoot the messenger.

Some would like to change the punctuation of a verse so it would fit their desires: "Anyone who has been stealing must steal. No longer he must work." The correct version is: "Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, he must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need" (Ephesians 4:28).

Generosity insight: one of the purposes of work, of making money is so we have something we can share with people. Generosity enables a person to see beyond themselves and to see others.

Chad came home from school and announced to his mom, "I'm going to make a Valentine for everybody in my class." Her instant thought: "I wish he wouldn't do that." She knew Chad was sensitive, shy and didn't have many, if any friends. She'd noticed he wasn't included by other kids when they walked home from school. They laughed and talked. Chad just kind of followed behind by himself. She thought he'd be disappointed because he wouldn't get cards.

Chad was insistent. He painstakingly labored for three weeks. On Valentine's Day he scooped up his cards and bolted out the door. His mom decided to make chocolate chip cookies for when he came home. Maybe they'd soften the hurt she expected he'd have.

She watched out the window as the kids came home from school. The group was doing their thing with Chad following behind but walking faster than normally. His arms were empty. She thought he'd burst into tears as soon as he got in the door. She had a hard time not crying. "I have some fresh chocolate chip cookies and milk for you." He didn't seem to hear but marched right past. All he said was: "Not a one . . . Not a one." His mom's heart was in her throat. Then he added, "I didn't forget a one, not a single one!" (adapted from Dale Galloway, *Dream a New Dream*).

Paul's generosity is visible in what and how he taught. READ Acts 20:27. He proclaimed the whole will of God, not bits and pieces of it. There weren't some parts he wanted to keep for himself. After all, he was a special apostle. There weren't truths that were too deep for other. There weren't people whom he deemed didn't need to hear as they weren't worthy. Paul shared with anyone and everyone: fellow prisoners in the Philippi jail, fellow Jews in synagogues and at the temple in Jerusalem, scared sailors during the storm, influential government leaders - governors, kings, the emperor - and people he met in the towns and villages he visited, people who were common, ordinary and undistinguished. Read Acts 20:26. Sharing the good news of Jesus was a massive part of him. It drove him. Read Acts 20:24.

He understood the transformative value God and his word could affect in a person's life. Read Acts 20:32. All who are placed into a right relationship with God receive two things. They're in the process of being built up in their spiritual lives. They're strengthened and able to grow in their relationship with God.

Second, they receive an inheritance from God. Generosity is often connected to an inheritance, a reward. Paul commended one church for being the only group at that particular moment who sent financial gifts of support. He expressed his gratitude, not as a means to receive more gifts from them, but with the desire that more could be credited to their account (Philippians 4:17). The gifts were "a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God" (Philippians 4:18). Then he offered a blessing to those who'd been generous: "And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19).

To another church he recited an adage: "Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously" (2 Corinthians 9:6). He went on to give the teaching that giving should be based upon "what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written: "They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever." Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God" (2 Corinthians 9:7 - 11).

Generosity insight: God loves cheerful givers because they're unselfish, unpossessed by possessions, willing, eager, have a concern for others, give unreluctantly. They're generous.

What if a neighbor requests help with a project? And the project would last maybe 15 minutes? Would you consider it generous if a person agreed to do it but grumbled and complained about it?

Another Scripture addresses generosity and the rewards/inheritance available. “Command them (the rich in the present world) to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life” (1 Timothy 6:18, 19). They will be laying up treasures in heaven. It's expressed as a firm foundation for the coming age. Not exactly sure what that means or how that works. There's also something that happens while they're alive. Generosity allows a person to take hold now of what is truly life.

We return to the saying by Jesus: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Jesus puts giving and receiving on a balance scale to see which has more weight and therefore more worth. Receiving is placed on first. It looks pretty good and feels pretty good because it's something we get and enjoy. The scale is completely tipped to its side. What happens when giving is put on the other side? Receiving flies up so fast it hits the ceiling.

Many of us participate in Operation Christmas Child by packing shoeboxes filled with school supplies, hygiene items, clothes, toys, etc. for kids around the world. It's a fantastic way to spread the love of Jesus Christ with somebody in a distant country. Videos of the kids opening their boxes show ecstatic joy as some receive gifts for the first time. They're blessed by what they receive. But the greater blessing goes to those who give, who provide the opportunity for kids to receive gifts, and more importantly, to hear about Jesus Christ, God's greatest gift, so they can experience eternal life.

In the aftermath of World War II the streets of London were filled with orphans. On a chilly morning an American soldier was returning to his barracks. He saw a starving boy with his nose pasted to the window of a pastry shop as the baker made a fresh batch of donuts. The GI silently walked behind the boy who let out a sigh as the delectable delights were placed in the display case. The soldier asked, “Would you like some?” The startled boy stuttered, “Oh, yeah... I would!” The soldier entered the bakery and bought a dozen. He gave them to the child saying simply, “Here you are.” The soldier turned toward his Jeep when the little boy tugged on his coat. “Mr... Are you God?”

People may not confuse us for God because of our generous actions. Hopefully, we can point them to Jesus. We give of ourselves to others. We give out of ourselves to others. We don't wait for them to give even when it comes to greeting one another.

Hear this final promise: “This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!” (2 Corinthians 9:12 – 15).