The Principles of Giving Can be Summed Up in One Word: Generosity

2 Corinthians 8:1-15

Have you ever wondered how much God wants you to give to the church and others in need?

When I first came on as the pastor here at Bonney Lake Community the United States was in the middle of a recession. Back then there was a group called “The Bonney Lake/Sumner Ministerial Association.” It was a group of local pastors who would meet every month to encourage each other and stay connected. I remember a lunch meeting we had at Godfather’s pizza where one of the pastor’s asked, “In the middle of this recession, how are we going to get our people to keep tithing?” There were about twelve pastors at the table and no one spoke up. In the awkward silence, I said, “I don’t even think tithing is a New Testament command.” It seemed to me that the more appropriate question would be “How are we going to help our people through this recession?”

I’m not naïve, I know it takes money to pay church staff and to keep the doors open and the heat on at a church. But it has never been nor will it ever be my job to strong arm people into giving. In fact, the more church leadership pushes giving, the more they rob the giver of joy. New Testament giving is not to be done under compulsion and it is always subject to the free choice of the giver. This doesn’t mean that everyone gives what they should give, but it leaves it open for people to give what they desire in there heart to give. I think this is important because there can be many wrong motivations for giving. On the website “Psychology Today,” I found an article that describes five types of gift givers. The context of the article was Christmas gifts, but I think it still helps to go through them. I shortened the descriptions a bit and took out the Christmas terminology.

**The Status Hound**

This is the costly gift as self-enhancement—a show of money or power, or perhaps both. In this case, the gift has nothing to do with the recipient but everything to do with the giver.

**The Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing**

This is the giver who likes to be thought of as a wonderful gift-giver but his or her spirit is no more genuine than the Status Hound; in the end, the gift is all about him or her.

**The Power Player**

Perhaps the worst kind of giver—the one who really knows how to manipulate the symbolic nature of the gift—these people are the likeliest to hurt or disappoint us. Because they understand how gifts can cause us pain, consciously or unconsciously, they choose gifts that do exactly that. (i.e. Someone comes to me and tells me they would like to donate so we could hire a competent pastor.)

**The Complainer**

it’s not just that you have to appreciate the gift the Complainer gives you; you have to listen endlessly to the travails and inconveniences he or she has experienced, especially during the acquisition of your gift.

(Someone actually came to me with tithe money and told me that they had been donating blood and plasma so they could give to the church)

And finally we have…

**The Genuine Giver**

The genuine giver actually thinks about the gift and how it will bring pleasure to the receiver.

The subject of giving is a sticky one and I try to avoid it. However one of my mentors taught me that teaching through books of the Bible helps you to teach the things that you would rather avoid. In 2 Corinthians chapter 8, the apostle Paul is encouraging the Corinthian church to be generous in their giving to the needs of the church. It is Paul’s hope that the Corinthians will be in the “Genuine Giver,” category. Therefore he goes on to write:

8 Now I want you to know, dear brothers and sisters, what God in his kindness has done through the churches in Macedonia. 2 They are being tested by many troubles, and they are very poor. But they are also filled with abundant joy, which has overflowed in rich generosity.

2 Corinthians 8:1-2 NLT

The first thing he alludes to is that poverty and troubles are mutually exclusive from abundant joy and rich generosity. The people in Macedonia were joyful and generous even though they were poor and going through trials. It reminds me of the widow’s mite.

41 Jesus sat down near the collection box in the Temple and watched as the crowds dropped in their money. Many rich people put in large amounts. 42 Then a poor widow came and dropped in two small coins.

43 Jesus called his disciples to him and said, “I tell you the truth, this poor widow has given more than all the others who are making contributions. 44 For they gave a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she had to live on.”

Mark 12:41-44 NLT

I want to point out that this does not mean widows should be giving everything they own to the church, instead the moral of Jesus’ story is that there are many who are equipped to give far more and would still have far more of a surplus than the poor widow. She gave out of the desire of her heart and in that specific case she gave everything she had. Some may call her foolish, but she was so overwhelmed by God’s love for her, that she considered it a privilege to give back all. This principle aligns with Paul’s next statement in chapter 8.

3 For I can testify that they gave not only what they could afford, but far more. And they did it of their own free will. 4 They begged us again and again for the privilege of sharing in the gift for the believers in Jerusalem. 5 They even did more than we had hoped, for their first action was to give themselves to the Lord and to us, just as God wanted them to do.

2 Corinthians 8:3-5 NLT

They not only gave far more than they could afford, it says that their first action was to give themselves to the Lord and to the ministers of the word. I know that it is hard to measure the spiritual benefits that are connected to attending and belonging to Christ’s church. But the benefits are real. Paying $100 bucks to go to a Seahawks game is very tangible. So it can be a little easier to fork over the money. On the other hand giving to your local church can sometimes lead you to ask, “Where is all my money going?” I get it. But just as our spiritual battle is unseen often times the effects of our giving is unseen as well. Whether seen or unseen, giving to the church and those in need always has eternal unseen benefits. It is a privilege to give to God’s work.

6 So we have urged Titus, who encouraged your giving in the first place, to return to you and encourage you to finish this ministry of giving. 7 Since you excel in so many ways—in your faith, your gifted speakers, your knowledge, your enthusiasm, and your love from us—I want you to excel also in this gracious act of giving.

2 Corinthians 8:6-7 NLT

Finances is not the only way to give. In these verses the apostle is encouraging the church for using it’s spiritual gifts and talents and yet he is still encouraging them to excel in the monetary grace giving. As we move to verse 8 Paul wants to reaffirm that he is not writing to strong arm them or to help them check off their giving duty. He writes:

8 I am not commanding you to do this. But I am testing how genuine your love is by comparing it with the eagerness of the other churches.

2 Corinthians 8:8 NLT

Giving to God and His people is not commanded, but instead Paul uses there generosity to test their spiritual heart rate and their blood pressure. Genuine love for God and for others will lead to eager generosity. He then reminds them…

9 You know the generous grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty he could make you rich.

2 Corinthians 8:9 NLT

Jesus gave of his whole self so we could be blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies. I know that it is very hard to measure what we have gained in Christ, but it is in fact “immeasurably more than we can hope or imagine.” It is Christ’s example of love and generosity that gives us a desire to be generous.

Next Paul reminds the listeners that he has seen the generosity they showed in the past. I always feel encouraged when someone reminds me of a past achievement in order to embolden me for a future task. Paul uses that approach when he says:

10 Here is my advice: It would be good for you to finish what you started a year ago. Last year you were the first who wanted to give, and you were the first to begin doing it. 11 Now you should finish what you started. Let the eagerness you showed in the beginning be matched now by your giving. Give in proportion to what you have.

2 Corinthians 8:10-11 NLT

In other words keep on keeping on and do it in proportion to your means. This is a good reminder, because generosity really doesn’t work like a flat tax rate. Whether you like it or not our generosity is more like a progressive tax rate. This is further demonstrated when Paul writes:

12 Whatever you give is acceptable if you give it eagerly. And give according to what you have, not what you don’t have. 13 Of course, I don’t mean your giving should make life easy for others and hard for yourselves. I only mean that there should be some equality. 14 Right now you have plenty and can help those who are in need. Later, they will have plenty and can share with you when you need it. In this way, things will be equal. 15 As the Scriptures say,

“Those who gathered a lot had nothing left over,

and those who gathered only a little had enough.”

2 Corinthians 8:12-15 NLT

This goes along with the attitude of the earliest beginnings of the church. In the book of Acts Luke wrote:

44 And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. 45 They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need.

Acts 2:44-45 NLT

Christianity is not 100% Capitalism, and it is not a socialist system. That’s one of the reasons that church leaders should not tell people how much they should give. In a socialist system the leaders enact compulsory giving, they collect and redistribute. Christianity, on the contrary, asks and leaves the choice up to the giver.

I will close today with a few of my own principles for giving.

Giving is Never to be done under compulsion (If giving is a law, then it is a curse).

We should give according to what we have been given.

We should never give so we can get. We are to give because we have already been given to.

Make sure you can pay your bills, before you give to the church or others in need.

Our desire for generous giving is an indication of how much we value what God has given us.

Don’t pick a percentage to give, instead give an amount that allows for joyful suffering.