

CHOOSING GENEROSITY:

What God Can Do With Open Hearts and Open Hands

2 Corinthians 9:6-12

Dr. Doyle Sager, First Baptist Church, Jefferson City, Missouri

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Yesterday, I officiated a funeral in Columbia. After meeting with the family at 9:00am, I had some time before the 11:00am service to do some final preparations. So I went to a local coffee shop. The family in line in front of me was placing their order, getting some Saturday breakfast. The mother said to the person behind the counter, "What about that homeless man outside? Has anyone taken him anything this morning?" And then she proceeded to buy several breakfast items and took them to the gentleman outside. Opportunities and examples of generosity are everywhere! I have several observations about this experience. First, do you suppose that lady was unable to make her mortgage payment this month because of her generosity? Second, I wonder what her heart felt like after sharing. And I wonder how the heart and stomach of the man on the street felt. Finally, I wonder why I didn't even see the man as I walked in. Opportunities for generosity are everywhere...if we're looking!

A lady was recently telling me about her grandmother. Her grandmother lived to be 100 and of those 100 years, more than 50 were lived as a widow. But every day she found someone to call and congratulate or encourage or thank. The editor of the local newspaper said anytime he got a phone call from her, he knew going to be a good day. Don't you want people to be able to say that about you? A generosity of spirit, of time, of pocketbook. It's amazing what God can do with open hands and open hearts...what God can do in us, the giver and in us, the receivers.

That's why this opening verse in our text is so important. *The Message* translates v. 6 this way: **A stingy planter gets a stingy crop; A lavish planter gets a lavish crop.** You don't have to be a farmer or even read the Farmer's Almanac to figure that one out. All generations have known this. And all cultures. And most of us are acquainted with the phrase, "seed money." There is a law of the harvest: we get what we sow, more than we sow and later than we sow.

Remember the context of Paul's comments here. He is collecting an offering for the famine-stricken church back in Jerusalem. While the churches north of Corinth are being generous, the Corinthians, who are better off financially, are being--how shall I say this?--NOT generous. So Paul says in v. 7 we are to give as we have made up our minds (the word means to decide beforehand, to be intentional, to choose with mind and heart). Not grudgingly (literally, "not with pain").

And why can we afford to be generous? Verse 8 answers. Because God is powerful to make grace and every blessing "super-abound." Translated, it would be this: **"super-abounding-spilling-over-more-than-enough."** Let's practice saying that together. It's the word used when Jesus fed the thousands (John 6:13). More than enough. Here is how *The Contemporary English*

Version reads in v. 8: **God can bless you with everything you need, and you will always have more than enough to do all kinds of good things for others.**

Warning light here. This does NOT mean that if we give \$100, God will see to it that we get an unexpected \$200 in the mail next week (although God is full of surprises). The blessings which we harvest may be a different sort. But God will keep the supply chain going. This also applies to generosity of time and service, loving and sacrificing. Haven't you had those times when you just feel you don't have any more to give? You're out of gas. In fact, you're on the verge of not caring. And then out of nowhere, God super-abounds! More seed comes for planting. God the giver is never exhausted, so we're never exhausted.

I remember one time when I was a boy. We were trying desperately to finish planting a field before the rains came. Dad was planting, but the planter was about to run out of seed corn. Mom had gone to town after more. He was getting lower and lower. Then, just in time, Mom drove into the field. We had seed for planting. Just in time, seed for planting so there could be a harvest.

But there's a danger here of making this about us. It's not. Read it again. Note the phrase, "...for others." Those in need are always front and center before us. Our church has a mission statement: **To honor and worship God by being an inclusive and diverse family of faith, sharing the love of Jesus Christ and empowering disciples.** We've been doing lots of thinking and praying lately about our strategic plan, how we do that. One thing is for sure. It won't happen without generosity. Someone has commented that when the Apostle Paul launched his life mission, his first question was not, "How much will it cost?" It was "What does God want?"

A man who traveled with his job decided one night to attend a minor league baseball game. During the third inning, it was announced that he had won a free oil change at a local garage. Since he didn't live there, he gave the certificate to the man sitting beside him. Around the sixth inning, there was a race of mascots. Wouldn't you know it? Every person seated in his section won a coupon for appetizers at a local restaurant and he gave that away, too. In the eighth inning, a young lady handed him a promotional envelope. A coupon good for two free dinners. He handed it to the couple behind him in the bleachers. Bruce, the one who received and passed on all these gifts, was follower of Jesus. He thought about his evening. He realized that some people see everything that comes their way in the same way he saw these three gifts. Not his. He's just the conduit, looking around for someone with whom to share them. Generosity is this: finding opportunities to be the presence of Christ to others and then investing in those opportunities. That's generosity.