

**“Extravagant Generosity”**  
**2 Corinthians 8:1-15 and Psalm 49**  
**Pastor James York**  
**March 6, 2011, North Presbyterian Church**

**SCRIPTURE READINGS**

**Psalm 49**

Listen to this, all you people! Pay attention, everyone in the world! High and low rich and poor—listen! For my words are wise, and my thoughts are filled with insight. I listen carefully to many proverbs and solve riddles with inspiration from a harp. Why should I fear when trouble comes, when enemies surround me? They trust in their wealth and boast of great riches. Yet they cannot redeem themselves from death by paying a ransom to God. Redemption does not come so easily, for no one can ever pay enough to live forever and never see the grave. Those who are wise must finally die, just like the foolish and senseless, leaving all their wealth behind. The grave is their eternal home, where they will stay forever. They may name their estates after themselves, but their fame will not last. They will die, just like animals. This is the fate of fools, though they are remembered as being wise.

Like sheep, they are led to the grave, where death will be their shepherd. In the morning the godly will rule over them. Their bodies will rot in the grave, far from their grand estates. But as for me, God will redeem my life. He will snatch me from the power of the grave. So don't be dismayed when the wicked grow rich and their homes become ever more splendid. For when they die, they take nothing with them. Their wealth will not follow them into the grave. In this life they consider themselves fortunate and are applauded for their success. But they will die like all before them and never again see the light of day. People who boast of their wealth don't understand; they will die, just like animals.

**2 Corinthians 8:1-15**

Now I want you to know, dear brothers and sisters, what God in his kindness has done through the churches in Macedonia. 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.

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. They begged us again and again for the privilege of sharing in the gift for the believers in Jerusalem. 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.

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. 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.

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.

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.

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. 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. Whatever you give is acceptable if you give it eagerly. And give according to what you have, not what you don't have. 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. 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. As the Scriptures say,  
"Those who gathered a lot had nothing left over, and those who gathered only a little had enough."

## **“Extravagant Generosity”**

The story is told that one day a beggar along the roadside asked for some change from Alexander the Great. The man was clearly destitute and quite bold and presumptuous even in asking anything from the powerful ruler. Yet the Emperor threw him several gold coins. An assistant was flabbergasted at his generosity and commented, "Sir, copper coins would adequately meet a beggar's need. Why give him gold?" Alexander responded, "Copper coins would suit the beggar's need, but gold coins suit Alexander's' giving.

We who follow Jesus walk in the way of the King of kings. The question before us is, "What kind of giving suits us as God's children? We are most like God when we extravagantly, lovely give.

Certainly God is extravagantly generous with each one of us. All we have, our life, the cosmos and everything in it is a generous gift given to us by God. God generously pours into our hearts joy, peace and love. God generously forgives, heals and redeems us. God has prepared an extravagant eternal home for each of us were we will enjoy eternal life. For God so loves the world that God gave and gave and gives and will always give. For God so loved the world that God gave Jesus God's only son. As Christians our giving is based on much more than meeting a need, our giving reveals the nature of God, our giving should be extravagant. We give because we serve a giving God who is extravagantly generous, the giver of every good gift and the source of life and love. We give to reveal God.

Our giving renews our soul. Extravagant generosity makes us Christ like. Pastor Robert Schnase says, "Giving reminds us that our ultimate worth is derived from the assurance that we are children of God, created by God and infinitely loved by God. God's eternal love revealed in Christ is the source of self-worth; true happiness and meaning are found in growing in grace and in the knowledge and love of God. Giving generously reprioritizes lives and helps people distinguish what is lasting, eternal and of infinite value from what is temporary, illusory and untrustworthy. The discipline of generous giving places people on the balcony helping them look out at the consumerist society with new perspective, better able to see its traps, deceptions and myths. The practice of generosity is a means by which God builds people up, strengthens their spirits and equips them to serve God's purposes."

Perhaps generosity starts with a holy indifference to one's circumstances. The Apostle Paul in a chapter entitled the joy of giving writes. **Philippians 4:12 "I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything with the help of Christ who gives me the strength I need."** Perhaps what makes Christian generosity extravagant is our giving is not determined by what one has or by the need, rather the giving is extravagant because of the love of God flowing through us. Paul knows what all of us should always remember.

No matter what you are a beloved child of God, cherished, forgiven and redeemed, no matter what God will wipe away your every tear, heal you and welcome you into the glorious mansion in heaven where you will enjoy the loving fellowship of the redeemed and God. In essence none of us having anything that truly matters to lose therefore we give generously. Extravagant generosity flourishes from the sharp awareness that the assets, resources and talents that God entrusts to us supersede the fear of scarcity and the obsessive focus on needs and problems.

Pastor Ken Carter tells of a friend who has a daughter that attends a school that has a poor reputation. Many complain about that school. His friend clearly has the means to send his daughter to any school. Yet they chose for their daughter to remain in the poor school and she is flourishing. Ken asked his friend, “why?” He responded, “It’s not the external circumstances in which we place our children but the faith we give them that really matters. Besides, perhaps her attending, our involvement and giving will help the other children”

Our self worth is not defined by externals—by our house, toys, degrees, perks, job, or achievements. Our self worth is infinitely valuable because we are God’s children. We are empowered by God. We do not give from a view of scarcity rather we give out of the abundance of God’s love and blessings. Giving that suits us, heirs of God, renews us. Martin Luther said, “Every Christian needs to experience three conversions: a conversion of the heart, a conversion of the mind and a conversion of the purse.”

Pastor Robert Schnase says, “Generosity describes the Christian’s unselfish willingness to give in order to make a positive difference for the purposes of Christ. Extravagant Generosity describes practices of sharing and giving that exceed all expectations and extend to unexpected measures. Fruitful congregations thrive because of extraordinary sharing, willing sacrifice and joyous giving out of love for God and neighbor. Such churches focus on the abundance of God’s grace and emphasize the Christian’s need to give rather than the church’s need for money. A Christian is driven to be generous by a high sense of mission and a keen desire to please God by making a positive difference in the world.

The apostle Paul says generosity is a fruit of the Spirit and **2 Corinthians 9:11** “**You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity.**” Generosity renews the soul and reflects the nature of God. Generosity is an aspect of character. The opposite of generosity is selfishness, self-centeredness, greed and being self absorbed. Generosity is freely giving time, self, love and money. How you use your resources either honors or dishonors God who gives you all.

The Bible has an abundance of stories encouraging us to be extravagantly generous. We are to give our very best, our first fruits to God. Jesus praises the poor widow who gave all she had, her two coins. Jesus warns us to not place our trust in earthly possessions, with the parable of the farmer, who kept building bigger barns to store his crops. Jesus asks, “The things you have attained, whose will they be?” Jesus warns, “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” The rich young ruler was exceedingly sad because he loved his possessions making him unable to sell them so he never discovered the joy of giving to the poor. Jesus told of three servants entrusted with various talents to illustrate God’s desire for the faithful to use what has been given to them productively. The steward who fearfully buries his talent for safe-keeping is rebuked. How you use what God have has given you matters to God. Jesus chastised the religious leaders for tithing while neglecting to give justice, grace and love to others. Zacchaeus the tax collector was so renewed by his dinner with Jesus that he gave his wealth to the poor and those he wronged. The parable of the God Samaritan reveals how we are to be extraordinary generous. The Samaritan binds up the wounds of the stranger, takes him to an inn, pays for the stranger’s care and commits himself to provide for the long term well being of the stranger. The Samaritan’s generosity, like Christ’s compassion, knows no bounds. Beyond all the teachings and parables we see God’s generosity in Jesus willingly dying on the cross to pay the debt

of our sins. God's self-giving is always extravagant, life-changing and joyous. We are encouraged to give not out of what we have rather out of our heart that has and is being filled with the love and blessings of Jesus.

An eighty year old man was working hard to plant a very small, young tree. His friend asked, "What kind of tree is that?" Smiling he replied, "It's a peach tree. I love to eat peaches." His friend said, "You are a crazy fool. You will never live to enjoy a peach from that tree." Undeterred the man replied, "I have been able to enjoy peaches all my life because somebody before me planted peach trees. And so I am planting this peach tree for somebody else to enjoy the fruit of this tree in the future."

All of us are the recipients of grace upon grace. We are the beneficiaries of those who came before us, who were renewed by the generosity of Christ enough to give graciously so that we could experience the truth of Christ for ourselves. What gifts are you giving for the generations to come? Those who practice extravagant generosity have a God-given vision and faith to plant trees whose fruit they will never taste.

The story is told of a little girl who was orphaned and livid on the street. A young lady found her, fed her, listened to her story and adopted her. The little girl was overjoyed by the generosity of this lady. She thanked her for a full stomach, a warm bed, her care and love then asked, "Are you God?" Her generosity revealed God. Her compassion and giving was God with skin on.

Copper coins would meet the need but gold coins suit the giving of a generous king. When we practice extravagant generosity we reveal God and that this world and every person matters to God. Practicing extravagant generosity renews our soul enabling us to radiate resurrection life, love and grace. Practice giving so your generosity suits you, an heir of our generous, giving, loving, joyous God. Amen

# **Soul Renewal**

Spiritual practices for your extreme makeover

## **Generosity**

### **Generosity is ...**

Generosity is an unselfish eagerness to give in order to make a positive difference for the purposes of Christ.

### **Practice Generosity by...**

- † extravagantly giving of time, talents, self, love and money.
- † giving in a way that suits you, an heir of Jesus, the King of kings.
- † giving more than meeting a need, giving to reveal the nature of God.
- † realizing all you have, every possession, blessing, life, salvation, love and joy have all been given to you by God to share.
- † prioritizing your life, distinguishing what is lasting, eternal and of infinite value from what is temporary, illusory and untrustworthy.
- † celebrating that your self worth is infinitely valuable because you are God's child.
- † having holy indifference to your circumstances, giving not determined by what you have, rather giving extravagantly always because of the love of God flowing through you.
- † giving from God's abundance rather than a view of scarcity.
- † honoring God with the faithful, wise and productive management of all your resources.
- † giving your best, your first fruits.
- † giving like Christ gives.
- † giving in long term ways that will bless future generations.
- † giving so extravagantly that others see you as God with skin on.