



Very soon it will be Christmas and we will have slogans shouting at us from every shop window, billboard and TV advert. We are told it's a "time of giving," and so we are encouraged to spend lots of money on presents for our friends and family. Actually what we are to really celebrate at Christmas is God's generosity in sharing his love with us by sending Jesus into the world. "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich." 2 Corinthians 8:9

**Definition of Generosity:** *the habit of giving freely without expecting anything in return. It can involve offering time, assets or talents to aid someone in need. Often equated with charity as a virtue, generosity is widely accepted in society as a desirable trait. Generosity is a guiding principle for many registered charities, foundations and non profit organisations.*

**A foundational value:** I am married to one of the most generous people I know. Rite loves to give stuff away. She models it with her words, actions, gifts and willingness to help in a multitude of ways. There is a constant flow from her heart. Me – I have to think about it for a while! I have definitely grown in this foundational value but know there is a long way to go. I wonder if there's some like me out there? A few months ago my wife Rite & I were teaching at the yearly staff conference in Holland. Rite had just spoken on generosity and I woke up with the thought – give away the booklets that you brought with you to sell. I know myself pretty well and so before I could think of excuses like "but I am only selling them at cost anyway," whoops too late, I put them in my bag ready to give away. There was an immediate rush for the book table as I made the announcement and I experienced a warm glow in my heart. It *really is* better to give than receive!

**Generosity as a lifestyle:** Over the years I have recognised that generous people make it a lifestyle. When I joined YWAM in 1977 I was so blessed by experiencing how a gift given in the community would be passed on many times before it found it's final destination and met a need. There was such a value of being alert to people's needs and sharing in giving in any way we could. It's obviously not just about finance but often it's through the very tangible issues of finance, that God frees us up, to let go of all kinds of other things too - our possessions, our time, our words, our homes, ourselves!

Patrick Dixon, the internationally known futurist, was speaking at the global leadership gathering recently and stated: "It's impossible to be fulfilled unless we are living for others unselfishly." It sounds like a simple formula doesn't it? Feeling unfulfilled lately? Perhaps you've neglected acts of generosity?

When you meet a really generous person, they make an impact on you. When I think of the word generous I remember a pastor that my wife and I met in Oregon years ago. We were travelling with a mobile team up the west coast of

the States and we were on the last leg of our journey. We were sharing in churches on route with a song, a dance and a preach as a team – looking back we were quite the motely crew. The first thing the pastor did as we arrived was to let us know that we would have the pulpit for the Sunday service. The following few days we were treated like kings and queens. We were wined and dined (well grape juiced actually) in homes and restaurants and made to feel so welcome. Rite was pregnant with our first child at the time and had no maternity clothes. The pastor's wife noticed her lack and being a seamstress herself, offered to make Rite a couple of dresses and send them to her a few weeks later.

As we were leaving, the pastor drove us to a gas station and was about to fill up our vehicles. I got out of the car a little embarrassed and said, "Pastor, thank you so much for all that you have done but really you don't need to do this as well." He responded immediately by saying, "Oh yes I do - When I began my ministry as a pastor, I committed to treat every person as I would treat the Lord Jesus if he visited." Wow what an attitude! The conviction has remained with me since that time. That day I saw someone who modelled himself after Jesus. John the apostle shares in chapter 1:16, "from his abundance, we have all received one gracious blessing after another." What a generous Lord.

**Generosity is related to godliness:** If a definition of sin is selfishness and the opposite of selfishness is generosity, then this character quality must move us towards holy living in a powerful way. God's love for us is shown in his incredible generosity – he forgives, forgets, heals, delivers, provides and guides and all without us deserving or earning anything. His love overflows in generosity. What a God! Peter said, "Jesus has given us an example for us to follow in his footsteps." 1 Peter 2:21

Rite and I have been overwhelmed with people's generosity towards us over these last couple of years. They include: a fully paid holiday, a beautiful car, very precious affirmations of what our words or time spent with them has meant, people supporting and helping us in all sorts of ways, like spending money to join us for a wedding and then working the whole time in order to help make the wedding happen. We have been very blessed.

**Prosperity is based on how much we give, not on how much we receive:** "Give and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full – pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back." Luke 6:38

The context of this verse is actually giving into the lives of others. Leadership is all about giving away what we have. Jesus underlined to the disciples that leadership is a step down not a step up. Leadership is becoming a servant and pouring our lives out as a sacrifice. Laying our lives down for our sheep. Giving, giving, giving. Without a generous heart we haven't started on the leadership journey. The blessing is that you can't give to others without learning and being blessed yourself.

**Cultivating generosity:** How do we cultivate generosity? If you are a gardener, then you know the work that goes into cultivating a vegetable patch. Every day it takes watering, weeding and fertilising. Some of us have come from

backgrounds where a generous lifestyle was modelled. For instance I grew up in an open home where I could invite my friends at any time, and where help was always available to those in need. I was encouraged to use my Saturday mornings as a teenager in taking physically challenged kids into town in their wheel chairs to go shopping. Sunday we always had extra food for speakers from church or people needing some encouragement. When you grow up in a home like that, you don't realise that everyone else doesn't live in this way. I have taken on my mum's motto: What God has given we need to share.

Some years ago Rite and I were in Russia. We were speaking on a DTS with a wide range of spiritual maturity in the student body. Some were pastors and some hardly knew the Lord. Rite was speaking one night on hearing God's voice. She had a burden for one young man from a very difficult background. We had taken a huge assortment of food, cards, and little gifts with us. We wanted to underline God being a generous God. We put all the items on tables and asked each student to ask the Lord who they were to give a gift to. Our prayer was that the Lord would teach this group about the principle of giving. After giving the instructions there was a rush for the table. Each individual knew who they were going to bless – writing notes and picking up gifts. The one young man Rite was burdened for had his lap filled with presents and tears flowed down his face. He needed to experience God's generosity not just hear about it.

Perhaps there is a cultivation of this precious gift necessary in your life, of sharing possessions, giving away what you have, buying gifts for others, sharing words of affirmation, giving quality time to others in friendship or helping in practical ways.

We all have much to give away? So it just requires practice - giving to those we love, live with and meet in our day-to-day lives. As the English expression shares: "practice makes perfect", or at least improves the quality a great deal!

How about this Christmas season asking God what outrageous generous act he wants you to be involved in? Then seek to make it a habit!

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