

## Generosity is the Secret to Life

For you know the generous act of our Lord  
Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for  
your sakes he became poor, so that by his  
poverty you might become rich.  
2 Corinthians 8:7-15

My wife and I try to keep up with current events by watching network news. After twenty-eight minutes of angst, the networks always try to end on an uplifting note, devoting ninety seconds to someone doing something to make the world a better place. Without exception, the common denominator of every story is generosity. Generosity is the secret of life.

Life-changing generosity is not an occasional act; it is an all-inclusive lifestyle that lubricates everything we say, think, and do. Paul addressed one dimension of generosity in his letter to the church in Corinth.

When times were hard in Jerusalem, Paul appealed to the church in Corinth to help in the relief effort. The church was blessed with gifts that were tailor-made for conducting a successful campaign—*faith, speech, knowledge, enthusiasm, and love*. So they assembled accurate information on Jerusalem's needs; they developed a compelling vision for addressing the needs; they recruited their best speakers and teachers to articulate the plan; they appealed to the faith and compassion of the congregation; and the result was a tremendous outpouring of pledges. So far so good. Then life got in the way, mostly in the form of creeping materialism and a church fight over behavior, theology, and leadership. The campaign slipped to the back burner. So Paul wrote:

*And in this matter I am giving my advice: it is appropriate for you who began last year ... to do something ...—  
now finish doing it.*

There is an instinct toward generosity in every human being, but there is also an equal and opposite instinct for self-indulgence and self-preservation. We have good intentions, but we sometimes stall when it's time to write the check. Paul explains,

- 1 Generosity is voluntary; it is not commanded. No good thing can be commanded. Generosity is a reflection of the genuineness of our love.
- 2 Generosity must surmount the hurdle that separates the idea of giving from the actual act of giving. This is no small thing.
- 3 Generosity, above and beyond taxation, is God's desired design for balancing financial inequality. As Paul puts it,

*I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. As it is written,*

*"The one who had much did not have too much,  
and the one who had little did not have too little."*

World Vision President Richard Stearns reports that American Christians control half of global Christian wealth. In his book *The Hole in our Gospel*, he said it would take just a little over 1 percent of the income of American Christians to lift the poorest one billion people in the world out of extreme poverty.

Those who claim to follow Jesus must always remember *the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.*

Generosity is the secret of life. Don't keep it a secret.

**BIBLE PASSAGE:**

*Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you—so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking.*

*I do not say this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others. For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. And in this matter I am giving my advice: it is appropriate for you who began last year not only to do something but even to desire to do something—now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means. For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has—not according to what one does not have. I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. As it is written,*

*"The one who had much did not have too much,  
and the one who had little did not have too little."*

*2 Corinthians 8:7-15*

**QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:** Where in your life is generosity natural to you? Where is it more difficult? How do you respond to this call for generosity—excitement, anxiety, resentment, guilt, curiosity, other?

**PRAYER:** Gracious God, you have made it clear that you bless people in order that they might bless others. Where I am selfish, forgive me. Where I am afraid, give me courage. Where I am ready, empower me. *Amen.*

From an article [www.theologyofwork.org](http://www.theologyofwork.org) by Dave Peterson. Dave is an ordained pastor who is the Director of Community Outreach for The Robert and Janice McNair Foundation and Scholarly Advisor for The H. E. Butt Family Foundation.