

Radical Generosity
RECLAIMING LOST VALUES
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(2 Corinthians 9:6-11 NIV) Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. {7} Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. {8} And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. {9} As it is written: "He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." {10} Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. {11} You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

Today we continue our Reclaiming Lost Values series, by looking at a value that increasingly we seem to be losing — and that is the value of generosity.

2005 saw record levels for giving among American's, because of three natural disasters — Tsunami in Indonesia — hurricane Katrina in the Gulf coast and three hurricanes in Florida. While it was a record amount, when looked at as a percentage of income — it was right at the 40 year average.

Jesus talks about our money — our resources — more than he does about prayer. So it would seem to me that we as Christians, have a particular need to reclaim the value of generosity.

Some interesting information

- Average giving among Americans — to all charities — is about 2.2% of income

- Persons in a lower socio-economic groups give a higher percent than those who have more resources

- The South gives more than the national average

- The Mid-west gives less than the national average

Burt Reynolds starred in an old film entitled *The End*. In the film he decides to commit suicide by swimming out as far as he can until he is exhausted and then just go under. But after going under he is looking at the surface from the

underside and decides not to go through with it. As he breaks the surface of the water he screams: "I want to live! I want to live!" He then begins to try to swim to shore, but it is a very long way off.

As he begins to swim he talks to God. He promises to obey all of the Ten Commandments, and then realizes he doesn't know what all of them are so he promises to learn them.

Then, in his panic, he says, "Lord, if you get me out of this, I will give you 80% of everything I have." But time passes and he is still going strong, and besides he can just begin to see the shoreline. But as he continues to swim he feels his strength holding out and says, "Lord, if you help me to get to shore alive I will give you 10% of all my earnings."

And, finally, he struggles to the place where he sees that he is just going to be able to make it to land and says, "Well, Lord, let's just forget about what I said before. I think I can make it from here on my own."

Reynolds' attitude is reflective of the attitude of many people today.

Giving to God or living for God are sometimes thought of as "paying our dues," or fulfilling an obligation.

What should our attitude toward giving be?

What is the proper way to give and think about giving?

The first point we need to understand is: Giving is an act of worship. It is an expression of gratitude to a faithful God for all his goodness to me. Giving is not just a response to a need in the church, it is a response of gratitude.

There are two very different bodies of water in Israel. They are called seas, but they really are large lakes.

The first is the beautiful Sea of Galilee. It is there that Jesus selected his disciples — calmed the waves — walked on the water — and performed many of his miracles.

The Sea of Galilee is fed by a bunch of streams that begin up in the mountains near the Lebanese border. Particularly Mt Hermon.

The Sea of Galilee is one of the life sources of Israel. Its waters are used by fishermen to catch the Famous St Peter's Fish — known to you and me as Tilapia. Its waters irrigate the fields that surround the Jordan Valley and produce banana's and citrus and vegetables that feed the nation.

The second body of water is way down to the south and the end of the Jordan Valley — but it differs greatly from the Sea of Galilee. As you get close you can

smell and feel it's strong pungent waters. And if you go for a swim, you find your body coated in salt. It is a lifeless sea — nothing lives in it. It is of course the Dead Sea.

The fascinating thing is, both seas are fed by the same water source, the Jordan River. One is alive and vibrant, the other is dead and smells of decay. WHY? Why the difference?

Water flows into the Sea of Galilee from the north and exits to the south. The dead sea also receives its water from the north — BUT and this is the important part, it has no outlet. Fresh water enters the Dead Sea only to stagnate and decay. The water leaves only through evaporation, hence why the area smells like it does.

I am willing to bet that you know people who are just like the Dead Sea. They are utterly self-centered, thinking only how they can get more and hoard more for themselves.

Jesus talks about this type of person:

"The farm of a certain rich man produced a terrific crop. He talked to himself: 'What can I do? My barn isn't big enough for this harvest.' Then he said, 'Here's what I'll do: I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I'll gather in all my grain and goods, and I'll say to myself, Self, you've done well! You've got it made and can now retire. Take it easy and have the time of your life!'

"Just then God showed up and said, 'Fool! Tonight you die. And your barnful of goods—who gets it?'

"That's what happens when you fill your barn with Self and not with God."
(Luke 12:16-21 The Message)

If you want to live a life of radical generosity then you must learn to live as a Sea of Galilee Christian — giving out as freely and readily as we take in — and not like a Dead Sea Christian.

The writer of Proverbs reminds us: (Proverbs 11:25 NLT)

The generous will prosper;
those who refresh others will themselves be refreshed.

So what does somebody who is radically generous look like?

Let me tell you a story.

Alexandra "Alex" Scott was born to Jay and Liz Scott in Manchester, Connecticut on January 18, 1996, the second of four children.

Shortly before her first birthday, Alex was diagnosed with neuroblastoma, a type of childhood cancer. On her first birthday, the doctors informed Alex's parents that if she beat her cancer it was doubtful that she would ever walk again.

By her second birthday, Alex was crawling and able to stand up with leg braces. She worked hard to gain strength and to learn how to walk. She appeared to be beating the odds, until the shattering discovery within the next year that her tumors had started growing again. In the year 2000, the day after her fourth birthday, Alex received a stem cell transplant and informed her mother, "When I get out of the hospital I want to have a lemonade stand." She said she wanted to give the money to the doctors to help them find a cure. True to her word, she held her first lemonade stand later that year and raised an amazing \$2000 for "her hospital."

For the next four years, despite her deteriorating health, Alex held an annual lemonade stand to raise money for childhood cancer research. Following her inspirational example, thousands of lemonade stands and other fund-raising events have been held across the country by children, schools, businesses, and organizations, all to benefit Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation for childhood cancer. On August 1st, 2004, Alex died peacefully at the age of 8 -- she had raised over \$1 million for childhood cancer research in her short lifetime.

As of January 2007, Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation has raised over \$10 million for childhood cancer research.

When the Scott's found out that their daughter had cancer, none of us would have blamed them if they dug in and built walls around their family.

But that is not what they did — Alex modeled to them Radical Generosity. She demonstrates that true generosity is both a quality and a practice. It is a quality void of complaint, full of gratitude and driven by concern. And it is a practice that will not let one sit still and do nothing while others are in need.

Alex is the epitome of Radical Generosity!

One of the most powerful and yet humbling verses of Scripture is found in Paul's letter to the church at Corinth. (2 Corinthians 9:11 NIV)

You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to

God.

We are rich, so that we can be generous.

But to understand why we as Christians particularly are to be generous, we need to be clear on some understandings that we have of God.

1. God owns it all

(Psalms 24:1 NRSV) The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it;

Martin Luther once remarked:

“There are three conversions necessary: the conversion of the heart, the mind and the purse. Of these three, it may well be that we find the conversion of the purse most difficult.”

No matter how much we earn — when we die — we leave it all behind. The author of Timothy reminds us: (1 Timothy 6:7)
we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it;

2. As God's people, we have to do God's work

We are God's children — who else should do it?

Should we expect somebody else to offer our open gym ministry? Or our Vacation Bible School — who will teach Christian values if we don't?

Giving is a lifestyle — not an activity.

3. God expects us to be generous

(Luke 12:48 NRSV) From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.

Peterson in his translation, the Message puts it even clearer:

Great gifts mean great responsibilities; greater gifts, greater responsibilities!

4. God expects equal commitment, not equal contribution

It is not the amount that matters — it is the sacrifice. And in order to sacrifice, we must give something up.

Remember story of the women at the temple who put 2 coins into the offering, while others put in great sums. Jesus says: (Luke 21:3-4 The Message)

"The plain truth is that this widow has given by far the largest offering today. All these others made offerings that they'll never miss; she gave extravagantly what she couldn't afford—she gave her all!"

5. Generous people have God's heart

The more you give — the more joy you have.

God gives it all, and invites us to become like God by being generous as well.

I want to end with why I give. Nancy and I give a tithe to the general expenses of Ridge Church. Beyond that we support many other charities in the community. We gave a total of 15% of our income to charities. I want to share with you a couple of reasons why we give.

1. I like how I feel about myself when I give

It feels good to give.

2. When I became a Christian, God asked me to become a giver

Giving isn't optional with God, it is essential. When I became a Christian, God gave me a new set of priorities, a new way of walking in the world. And as I grew, I came to understand that God wanted me to be a giver just like God is — and I don't complain or feel that my gifts are a tax — I see them exactly as that — GIFTS

3. I can't ask you to give, if I don't give

4. I believe in what we are doing at Ridge Church

5. I want to model generosity to my children

6. It just seems like the right thing to do