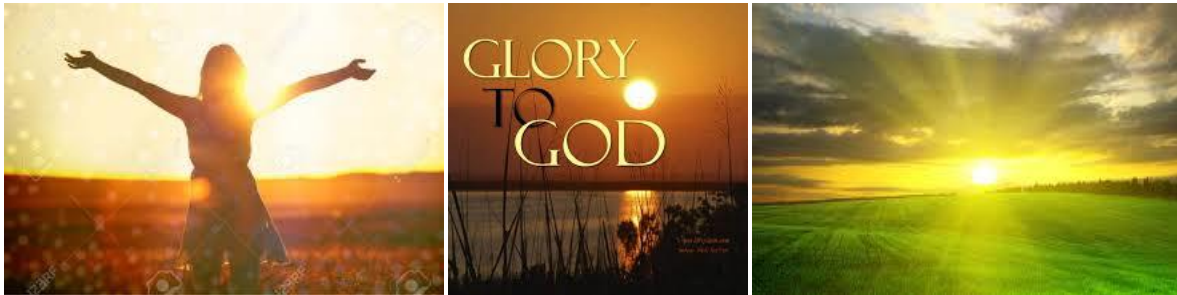


Overflowing Generosity

Learning 4

Generosity Glorifies God!



Word/Witness/Apply

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, whether we have little or much, help us to always live open-handed in a tight-fisted world and to find our greatest joy in following and serving you. We dedicate all we are and all we have to you on this day as living sacrifices. Amen.

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:10-11 ESV)

Living for God. As believers, we are to give and bring glory to God. Every time we give, a story begins and the rippling effects of one simple act are immeasurable. Every contribution we make is an opportunity to bring glory and honor to God.

To “glorify” God means to give glory to Him. The word *glory* as related to God in the Old Testament bears with it the idea of greatness of splendor. In the New Testament, the word translated “glory” means “dignity, honor, praise and worship.” Putting the two together, we find that glorifying God means to acknowledge His greatness and give Him honor by praising and worshiping Him, primarily because He, and He alone, deserves to be praised, honored and worshipped.

Generosity brings Glory to God! 1 Chronicles 16:29 “Ascribe to the LORD the glory due His name; Bring an offering, and come before Him; Worship the LORD in holy array.”



How we glorify God can be found in **1 Peter 4**. Each of us, by our faith in Christ, has *received* special spiritual gifts (talents and abilities empowered by the Spirit) to be used in ministry for the church. The grace of God flows from the individual to the congregation, from the congregation out into the world. By God’s grace, each of us is given “unique sets” of spiritual gifts, and these gifts of time, talent, testimony and money flow *through* us back to God in thanksgiving and praise! For Peter, there were two categories of gifts, the gifts of speaking and serving in the life of the body. These are the manifestation of God’s grace to be used to the glory of God.

The type of stewardship that Peter refers to as **speaking** is the stewarding of the word of God. For those who preach and teach, this means to sense the majesty and weight that one is proclaiming God’s word: An open Bible on the part of the preacher in the pulpit and an open Bible in the pew, because each are under the authority of God’s word. The gift of speaking also comes in the form of teaching (Bible studies, during council sessions, teaching stewardship during Advent/Lent and youth ministries) and testimony, the corporate and personal sharing of one’s faith with the congregation and in one-on-one encounters with those you meet.

The type of stewardship that Peter refers to as **servicing** is the stewarding of time, talents and money. How do you worship the Lord with your talents, intellect and creativity? You may have been given the gift and love for math. You could be a teacher, an engineer or an accountant/CPA. How might you use your vocation in math to glorify God? You may have been given the gift and love for parenting, computers, graphic design, construction, chemistry and/or medicine. How are you using your gifts, your vocation (careers/occupations) to glorify and praise God?

“God is milking the cows through the vocation of the milkmaid”, said Luther. According to Luther, vocation is a “mask of God.” He is hidden in vocation. We see the milkmaid, or the farmer, or the doctor or the pastor or the artist. But, looming behind this human mask, God is genuinely

present and active in what they do for us. For Christians viewing vocation as the mask of God, we see all of life—even the most mundane and menial facets of our existence—become occasions to glorify God.

Peter stresses three things about these gifts:

- 1.) They are for others,**
- 2.) They have different functions,**
- 3.) They are to bring glory to God.**

The key concept in **1 Peter 4:10** is we are good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gifts you have received. Milo Kauffman said it well,

The Christian steward has both hands wide open. One hand is open to receive God's grace—forgiveness, cleansing, salvation, abundant life, and assurance. He or she has experienced the peace of God, and the love of God has flooded his or her heart. His other hand, the giving hand, is also wide open as he or she administers God's gifts and shares them with others. Only as we open our receiving hand can we open our giving hand (Kauffman, 61).

The clearest evidence of a generous church is a willingness to give that flows naturally from hearts touched by God's unmerited grace. The primary goal when creating a generous culture in your church is not financial gain or expansion of your budget. In fact, the real goal has very little to do with money. The real goal is spiritual formation.

Generosity brings Glory to God! There are so many powerful stories in the Old Testament about generosity and how it glorifies to God.

Exodus 35:5-21

Before the building of the tabernacle, Moses made an appeal to the people in the Israelite community to give to the building of the Tabernacle to the glory of God. Through Moses, the Lord asked the people to bring their gold, silver, bronze, dyed yarns, leather, wood and spices. Moses also asked the people with various unique abilities and special skills to use them for God's glory.

The men and women also brought a freewill offering for the work of the Lord. Those whose hearts were stirred gave cheerfully to the Tent of Meeting. With great enthusiasm and hopefulness, they gave because they knew how important it was to the completion of God's house. In fact, they gave so much that Moses had to ask them to stop giving!

I Chronicles 29:1-20

In the building of the temple, King David gave from his personal fortune and he encouraged others to follow his example. They did so willingly. In a prayer, David praised the Lord in the presence of the whole assembly for God's generosity made evident by the people's response. David responds, 29:14 "But who am I, and what is my



people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you." We may not have David's wealth, but we can develop his willingness to give!

The leaders displayed this "whole-hearted" devotion to the Lord and the appeal.

Generosity begins with the leadership!

Word/Witness/Apply

While in Tanzania visiting Lutheran congregations, our ambassador group witnessed the most amazing thing. The worship service had "two" offerings! Believers would come up to the front of the sanctuary and place their offerings at the foot of the chancel. Some people brought currency, while others brought brown eggs, stalks of sugar cane, sacks of flour, chickens and goats—all very valuable items—equivalent to money. After the worship service, we all moved outside, formed a huge circle around the items and the bishop prayed. Those who needed them then purchased these items and the proceeds were used towards the daily needs of the congregation and people in the community.



In ancient Israel, before the building of the temple, people gathered around some vernacular form of altar and each person brought an offering to God. Some brought drink offerings and poured them out on the altar. Others brought grain offerings, birds and animals and left them there and they were consumed in the fire. The liquid was poured out, animals were slaughtered, and grain was incinerated. People gave offerings as an act of worship, and worship glorifies God.

The offerings had no other use but to be a sacrifice, ***a sacrifice whose sole purpose was to bring glory to God!*** Envision, for a moment, your congregation's Sunday morning offerings being placed on the altar, a match being thrown into the offering plate and all the checks and currency going up in smoke!

The point was not what happened to the offering after it was placed on the altar; the point was simply putting the offering on the altar in the first place (Powell, 9-10).

Our giving is to be motivated by the gospel of God's grace. In the same way that God freely gave of himself through the death and resurrection of Christ, congregations should also be willing and eager to give freely wherever and whenever there is a need.

So often we give to a budget. Or we give so the poor may be fed, or so the mortgage and salaries may be paid. And even though these are very good reasons to give, our primary reason for giving to God is to give up [sacrifice or renunciation] something we truly value for the glory of God.

So often pastors and leaders are apologetic in their attempts to ask believers to use their time, talents, testimony and/or money. And when we are apologetic, our asking comes off awkward and offensive. We can pretend to be many things. We can preach and teach on the subject of generosity, but it's nearly impossible to fool people into thinking you're a generous person. The only way people will see your congregation as a generous community is to be visibly generous.

The "good news" is that when we do live generously, it compels people outside the church to take a second look, to re-evaluate what they think about God and faith!

Word/Witness/Apply

So how does a congregation create a culture of generosity that glorifies God?

1. Culture is shaped by values. **Describe the culture of generosity in your congregation? How does the generosity in your congregation glorify God?**
2. In 1 Peter 4, Peter describes the practice of generosity and being stewards of God's grace. **How might these guiding principles change how your congregation plans and talks about its financial future (Willard, Sheppard, 38)?**
 - a. Bless people
 - b. Base the budget not on what you believe you can get but on what you believe God wants.
 - c. Spend it; don't save it.
3. **In your leadership, how clear are you in your communication about what you believe about generosity and money? Is generosity a core value in your personal life and the life of your congregation? Please give examples.**

4. **Ancient Israel brought valuable offerings—lambs, birds, grain and drink—and then they were incinerated, a sacrifice used for the sole purpose of glorifying God.**
 - a. In your giving, do you mainly give to receive?
 - b. Do you give with strings attached?
 - c. Do you trust God and give freely when there is a need?

5. **In what ways are you providing the right conditions for your congregation to grow in its understanding and practice of generosity?**
 - a. Developing a congregation-wide biblical world-view by learning and applying God's word.
 - b. Stating clear expectations that stewards are called to bring a tithe (one-tenth) in loving obedience to God's gracious provisions.
 - c. Unapologetic in asking for annual and special financial appeals.
 - d. Intentional about informing, inspiring and inviting people to give.
 - e. Celebrating, celebrating, celebrating...spiritual growth, increases in giving, new mission and ministries!

6. **We are at the end of our Overflowing Generosity 4-week study. Has anything changed in your understanding and practice of generosity?**

If you are not already, would you like to be a person who is spiritually and financially able to give ten percent of your income to the church?



Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, we give you thanks and praise for your generous love towards us. Help us to live for you each day and each week by giving you first place in our calendars and our finances. Show us what you have already placed in our hands. Help us to use it for your glory. AMEN.

(The author is Pastor Dona Johnson, pastor of Christ the King Lutheran Church, Centerville, Ohio.)