

We are radically generous.

1 Timothy 6:6-21 (CGS #3)

INTRODUCTION:

Over the course of September, we are looking at our mission, vision, and values as a church. Over the last two weeks we have explored our mission and how we are committed to community. This week, we are looking at our value of radical generosity.

Generosity in the biblical view is driven by the idea of contentment and in response to God's leading generosity. Think back to Cain and Abel. Abel honored the Lord with his "first fruits" sacrifice (Gen. 4). Abel's right and honorable generosity was only possible because God had first provided a harvest. Abel, being content with what he had, was motivated by God's provision to be generous. The very opposite was true of his brother, Cain. As we turn page by page through the Scriptures, we see this same generosity principle applied. God first meets the needs of his people, and then they are to rightly respond in generosity. This provision and response cycle was so radically different in the ancient world from any other religious expression. The one true God of Israel intervened and provided first for his people; then their sacrifices were a response. In all other religions, sacrifices came first to appease the gods and try to convince them to provide what was needed. How beautiful is it that our God is inclined for our good even without our scrambling or frantic efforts?

The Apostle Paul affirms this same reality in his letter to Timothy. Timothy was a young pastor stationed in Ephesus. Ephesus was a tough place to be a pastor, and it had an especially strong obsession with wealth. In Paul's letter, he reminds Timothy that it is "God who has given life," that "we came into this world with nothing," and that "God richly provides." These are powerful truths that combat the pride and greed that is associated with materialism. They also cause the Christian to think differently about their resources or time, talents (abilities), and treasure (money). Paul doesn't condemn earthly wealth in his instruction, nor does he celebrate it. These were and are the two most common worldly responses. We either demonize or vilify those we determine are "wealthy." Which, by the way, "wealthy" is such a sliding, subjective scale, isn't it? Paul commands the believer to "be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share" their resources and wealth. Again, this command is rooted in the initial and first generosity of God. It is God who gave, provided, and blessed before we did anything. Our generosity is not motivated by moral piety or some sort of guilt-laden pity. It is a genuine and joyful response because of what God has already done for us. Paul then says that this is a "good foundation for the future." Why? Because it enables our contentment in our present reality by rooting us in the eternal future that is ahead. We know what is coming in eternity, and so we can live differently now. We know that God will provide in the future, so we can be generous and less anxious with our resources here and now.

This is why we value radical generosity as a local church. God has given all of us the resources of time, talents, and treasure. How we view and use those resources is as much a part of our faith as is our intellectual belief and doctrinal commitments. In fact, it is a key part of following Jesus in a life-defining way. When we trust God with our resources and allow him to direct how we use them, we recognize that he gets to define every part of me. Paul calls this worship (Rom. 12:1-2). One of the beautiful things about focusing on whole-life worship of God is that it actually helps to avoid sins like irreverent babble, slander, dissension, and pride. All things that Paul tells Timothy to make sure that the people of God do not take part in. Generosity is just a principle about giving; it is an act of worship that roots us in God's present provision and deepens our hope of eternity. **We value radical generosity because God was generous to us first.**

GETTING STARTED – As a group, take time to answer this question. What was a time in your life when you benefitted from someone's radical generosity? That is, they gave abundantly of their time, talents, or treasure for your good.

IN THE WORD – Let's dig back into the passage(s). It is important to strengthen our muscles in reading God's Word. On Sunday, we walked through the passage in the sermon. Hopefully, that helped you to see the landmarks of the passage with fresh eyes. Now, with your group, go back through it and see what God is saying to you specifically.

First, before you read the passage, take a moment to ask God's Spirit to quiet your mind and heart and to illuminate the text to you. Second, read the passage aloud to the group. Then, follow the simple method below. (O.P.A)

Observe: Make 8-10 observations from the passage. Pay close attention to observe and note repeated words and phrases, names, places, and themes.

Principles: From your list of observations, what patterns or big ideas do you see emerging? Can you distill it down into 2-4 big idea truths?

Apply: Moving from your list of principles, it is time to apply God's Word. Remember, we believe that God's Word is living and active and that it can change the way we live Monday- Friday. What is one tangible way to apply a truth from your list above?

Note: Another way to approach your time together is to talk through the following questions.

1. What stands out to you about Paul's instruction to Timothy in this section?
2. Of all of Paul's instructions in this section, what is the most challenging to you personally? What act of obedience or step of faith do you hear the Spirit of God inviting you into?
3. Can you name specific ways that you're leveraging your time and resources to make an eternal impact wherever God places you? ... Think about your time, talents, treasure.
4. Generosity with our time should include margin for relationships with those that are different from me. Do I have the margin to intentionally cross cultural, social, and other barriers to listen to others and respond to their needs?
5. Am I compelled by God's radical generosity to invest my finances deeply in the work of the Kingdom?