



“Faith that Bears Fruit”

Texts: 1 Timothy 6:17-19; Galatians 5:13, 14, 22, 23, 25

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FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH - EVANSVILLE, INDIANA

Today we are talking about Generosity. Generosity is one of the fruits of the Spirit. The gifts of the Spirit reflect the life that God wants for us, to live in love and joy and peace, but also to care for one another through kindness and generosity.

What do you think of when you hear the word generosity? When I think of generosity, I think about all the people who have been generous to me in their gift of time, of their acts of kindness, of love. Of people who even at times gave me gifts of money when I was a struggling single mother with a car in need of major repairs or needed help with moving expenses. I have been blessed with generosity of time from my mother who cared for my kids when I was working, to friends who uplifted me during my divorce, and even strangers whose passing words of kindness made my day a whole lot happier.

Principles and examples of generosity are evident throughout the Bible and they remind us that whether we are on the receiving end of a generous act or you are being blessed by the joy of giving to others, generosity is a character trait that we can all appreciate.

This morning I would like us to think about five points about generosity.

One: Generosity is a simple act. Hebrews tells us: “And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifice God is pleased.” (Hebrews 13:16)

We live in such a transactional society. We give to get is the saying, right? But the Bible teaches us that generosity is simple and without any strings attached. We teach our children to share, not for what they might get in return, but just because it is good to share what we have with others. God gives to us not to get something in return, but because God loves us fully. Just as we give to our children, God gives to us and wants us to share out of the bounty of what we have been blessed with.

Two: Generosity is all about the heart. As the motto for our generosity campaign says: *Generosity: a gift of the heart.*

1 Corinthians 13:3 says in the famous 'love' passage: "If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing."

Before we practice generosity, the Bible teaches us that giving to others is inextricably tied to loving others. Without loving our neighbors - including our family, friends, colleagues, church members, and the vulnerable members of our community - even the grandest acts of generosity are meaningless.

On the flip side, even the smallest acts of kindness and generosity are considered momentous when coupled with love.

Three: Generosity involves more than money.

"Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share." (1 Tim. 6:18)

The Bible provides plenty of examples that encourage material generosity towards the poor and the oppressed, generosity and various other good deeds can be expressed in a multitude of ways.

Giving of our time and talents are two big ways we can give generously. When I think of people who have given their time and talents to me, I think of my Sunday school teachers and youth advisors who made youth group not just fun but helped me to encounter God in a personal way. They generously gave me their faith to see and experience and learn from. I think of mentors who guided me and used their wise words to help me grow and friends who gave of their time and love to support me through the many times of grief I've gone through - my divorce, a beloved friend who was killed by a drunk driver, my brother who died in his thirties, and the passing of my dear parents. Who among us have not experienced grief and yet have been helped through it by the love and kindness of friends? All of this is the generosity that God wants us to give to one another, whether it be a family member, a friend, or a stranger.

We live in a time of great instability within our society where anxiety is high. We need to be generous with each other in love and understanding and patience. A listening ear, a hug, an encouraging word can make a difference to how someone's day is going. They are all expressions of the generosity God wants us to give.

Four: Generosity teaches us to trust God.

1 Timothy goes on to say: "Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything we need." (1 Tim 6:17-19)

Giving generously is an opportunity for us to trust in God's provision. Last week, I made reference to my church in my Miami. I heard later in the week that some thought I was criticizing this church on what they gave to mission compared to what that church gave and that thought never entered my mind when I was writing that sermon. The "did you know" for this week is that when I arrived here I was told that the emphasis for mission for this church was local mission. And it is indeed a passion for this church, which is good. The various local missions that are supported by this church are all well known and do good work. However, I eventually learned that this church also gives \$14,000 dollars to the PC(USA) global mission work. Did you know that? The problem is that a check was always written without there being any identification of particular missionaries or mission projects which could be identified of being blessed by this generous gift. That is why I have pushed the mission committee to identify a missionary and a project that they would like the church to specifically support. This is important because it helps you to learn what good your generosity is doing in the lives of not just the organizations in this city, but of the impact on lives your giving is having on those suffering in hardships abroad. That connectedness to the global family of God is important and necessary. It also gives us opportunity to learn from those who have lived vastly different lives from our own.

The point I was trying to make last week when I referenced that church was that their motto of "God will provide" is something I think many Americans need to learn. Our society is so geared to the individual being able to make it. We worry and stress about so much that is outside of our control, forgetting that God will provide.

When I mentioned earlier that people surprised me with gifts of money when my car broke down, that was God providing. After my brother died, who was the sibling I was closest to, I came home one day to find someone had anonymously left in my mailbox an envelope with a \$100 bill in it and a note that said, "Go do something fun and relaxing. This money is meant to be used only for something fun just for you." Relying on God to provide when we don't have enough money to repair a car or put food on the table or to make doors open when they all seem closed. God will provide. God always does.

Five: Generosity is a blessing. Acts 20:35 says: "...remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

In worldly terms, giving means we have less than what we started with, but the Bible teaches us that when we give to others, we gain. Haven't you found that to be true?

This verse provides us with a heartwarming reminder that giving to someone in need or supporting a cause like homelessness, can bring us a great sense of fulfillment and joy.

The story of Jesus Christ's life and ministry in the Bible is full of examples of generosity. Jesus sets a high standard of giving and caring for others because in the kingdom of God, people in need are just as important as the wealthiest people in the world. AS we learn how to adopt principles of generosity, let us continue to look to Jesus as the ultimate expression of generosity and sacrifice.

Before I end, I would like to take a moment to tell you about 12 people who have been extremely generous with their time and talents and that is your Session. After Kevin died, I am told that the Session rose to fill the leadership void and, I understand that Mike Thissen became sort of the lead Elder. When he passed, the Elders again rose to fill the big gap that his passing left.

Since I have come, I have pushed the Elders in what has needed to be done to prepare this congregation for moving forward into a healthy and prosperous future. They have done all that I have asked with graciousness, energy, commitment, joy, and faith. They have been a delight to work with and I am fully confident that these people were all meant to be part of this Session at this time.

This Session has organized into several fully functioning committees and people from this congregation have stepped up to be a part of these committees. There are now the following committees: Education, Worship, Generosity, Membership and Outreach, Building and Grounds, which has been responsible for overseeing all the painting that went on this summer, Technology, which has been hard at work updating the office computers and the sound system for our online viewers, Security, which always has our safety foremost in their minds, Personnel, and I may be forgetting one or two, but you can see they are hard at work. And, you can see their generosity of time through the gift of their leadership in the book study. I am happy to tell you that over 50 people have been participating in the book study and that the groups are coming up with wonderful ideas that will help lead this church into its future. This could not have been done without the leadership of the Elders. I am happy that we are moving forward and so many good things are coming together for this church, which is being made possible by all of us coming together and generously sharing for our future together. Amen.



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