

Preface

If you're thinking, 'oh no, not another book on fundraising!', rest assured, this book isn't that. This book, in my humble opinion, applies to every born again Christian, not just for those who would call themselves donors, philanthropists or givers. It's vitally important for all Christians to rediscover the theology of generosity. I'm biased of course as the author, but just hear me out. I believe this is an area of understanding that we all severely lack in the church today, particularly in the West. The thing is, our understanding and practice of generosity actually says a lot about our knowledge of God and the condition of our own hearts as a result. It says a lot about our hearts. So this is important stuff!

I was moved to write this book in order to drill deeply into the subject of generosity and not to focus on the practical aspects of giving. I observed this deficiency through my work among networks of donors, generosity movements and many church congregations. In the process of writing I recognized a deficiency in myself too. Many books will encourage you

to give, tell you that it is a good thing to give and that you'll receive joy when you give. This is true of course, but here, I want to address the 'why?' of giving. For me, this was the burning question no one seemed to be answering. We need more than 'it's a good thing to do'. The motivation to give will determine the kind of giver you'll be, and whether you'll be a happy or reluctant giver. Without addressing this issue, I fear that we are robbing givers of joy and robbing the church of greater kingdom resources. We are also in danger of missing out on God's generous nature and thereby skewing our entire understanding of Him, which has implications upon how we understand His mercy, His love, His anger. We need to see into the very heart of our generous creator God.

I think Christians should be the most cheerfully kind and generous givers. Why should all Christians show profoundly more generosity than non-Christians? (The 'why' is normally always more important than the 'what?') The answer comes down to the motivation, the drive behind the act. Why do people do incredibly generous and selfless acts? Why even be generous at all, let alone being cheerfully generous? The difference between a Christian and a non-Christian is that with a Christian, generosity is overflowing from our life in Christ. It's a heart response because we are recipients of such amazing grace. We didn't save ourselves, we simply said yes to the greatest gift. Logic would then dictate that Christian generosity must stand out from that of the 'normal' worldly generosity. In this sense we Christians should possess an unnatural and godly generosity. A cheerful, outrageous and extravagant generosity. We can be generous in many ways. I'll

Preface

highlight only a few ways here in order to make application to everyday life, but I think that serving, giving money, giving time and talent, hospitality, food, stuff and good works, can all be bunched together under generosity.

This kind of happy generosity must be driven by love and not merely by pity or our fallen compassion. Although we should feel pity and compassion in giving like Jesus, if we relied on our cold compassion, we would hardly give at all! Neither is generosity motivated by legalistic duty or obligation. It shouldn't be a reluctant generosity, Christians aren't to give grudgingly. If our motivation is to make ourselves feel better, then the motivation is self-centred even though gifts are meant for someone else. Generosity cannot be cheerful because we're in essence trying to buy cheerfulness! Quite often, generosity can actually be transactional. 'Oh, I'll give to that because I like them and I get a free book'. This is quite a common method used in Christian fundraising and I have used it myself in fundraising for my ministry. Ministries feel they must add incentives for people to give. Perhaps the motivation is for tax purposes and it ends up being a legal incentive rather than generosity.

Christian generosity is to be a godly generosity, to be like that of our God. Yes, the unregenerate know how to give good gifts to their children, but how much more our Heavenly Father who gives good gifts to His children! So, we who are His children share this characteristic with our Father: overflowing, rejoicing generosity! We do to others what we would have them do to us. In fact, the Apostle Paul urges us to outdo each other in doing good to each other. How can any

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one of us actually live this out on a daily basis? How can we sustain this throughout our lives? It seems unobtainable. Well, it is if we try in our own strength and will.

In Mark's Gospel, chapter 12, when Jesus answered the scribe's greatest commandment question, He said:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

These are the greatest commandments in the Bible, according to Jesus. Why are they the greatest? It's because our good works flow out of loving God, and because we love God we can love others as ourselves and do good works for them. That's the key! This is the overflow of gospel generosity. I know that this is the ministry philosophy used by many successful and healthy churches around the world. It is the roadmap for how we can possibly achieve the kind of profound generosity and good works described here. Firstly, we must love the Lord our God with all that we are, then, and only then can we love others as ourselves. Not through a transaction, what we can get in return, but because we love God unreservedly who has given us all things freely.

The Psalmist in Psalm 119:32 declares:

I will run in the way of your commandments when you enlarge my heart!

We can keep the Lord's commandments because we have a big heart for Him. We no longer have a selfish, self-centred stony

Preface

heart. God figuratively gives us a heart of flesh that keeps growing in capacity for loving Him and others. The more we enlarge our knowledge of God, the more we love Him and love others. We become big-hearted.

The sad conversation Jesus had with the rich young man in Mark chapter 10 verse 17, shows that he loved his money and possessions more than the God he said he served. If he had loved God as he should, he would love others, and the overflowing love of God would mean that he would be free to bless others, give all that he had and follow Jesus. Instead, he went away from Jesus sorrowful. Jesus exposed the man's heart to himself, and God wasn't his first love. This is why truly generous giving is a healthy practice for Christians, because it helps us to keep loving God first before our wealth, status and possessions. It helps loosen our dependence on material things and keeps our love pointing in the right direction, to Jesus.

As you read this book, please use the opportunity for self-examination and reflection. Writing this book has profoundly challenged me to question my own heart. Am I generous enough? Are my motivations to give, godly? Lay your heart open before God. Let Him work in your heart as He desires you to be conformed to Jesus. Allow the Holy Spirit to change you to become more and more like our rejoicing, generous, life-giving God. Don't let your possessions prevent you from following Jesus. You won't regret abandoning yourself for Jesus. You will regret looking back and wondering, 'what if I had acted on my convictions? What would have happened if I had obeyed the voice of Jesus?' Don't go away sorrowful.

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Ask God to enlarge your heart for Him. To love Him and others more than yourself.

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Lockdown, April 2020