

COLLECTIVE

Life of Giving and Generosity

2 Corinthians 8:7 - *“But since you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you – see that you also excel in this grace of giving.”*

Giving and generosity are virtues that are often tied to Christian values and lifestyle. However, it is also a controversial topic that is often misunderstood and misquoted. Most people, Christians and non-Christians alike, would have no issues in being generous with their time, talents and gifts. However, when generosity requires the parting of monetary possessions, it is often a more arduous discussion!

There are often two incomplete and misconceived perspectives to giving:

(i) Our giving is driven by our understanding that our local church needs monetary contributions to keep the lights on, hence we are contributing a minimal amount on a regular basis, or (ii) our giving is an atonement for our “sins” that were created in our pursuit of economic returns in the marketplace.

For Christians, a decision to give or not-to-give should not be primarily financial or transactional (i.e., give in order to receive) in nature. Our fundamental approach to giving should be **rooted in our understanding of the nature of God and our relationship with God as our Father and provider.**

Fundamentally it begins with our heart - and not just head - in the revelation that God is love. John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son...”, is a simple yet powerful summation of God’s love and that love gives.

Here are three biblical truths that will hopefully motivate us to adopt a lifelong habit of generosity and giving:

1) All that we have belongs to God.

Psalms 24:1 - “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it;”

Understanding the true meaning of giving and generosity begins with our acknowledgement that all that we have belongs to God, including that of our earthly possessions. Our ability to gain wealth and make a comfortable living is a gift from God.

If that is ingrained in our belief system, we are then simply called to be faithful stewards of God’s abundance that has been poured out into our lives.

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Our approach towards giving and generosity therefore ought to be aligned towards furthering His purposes of propagating His love for the people and community around us.

1 Timothy 6:17-18 - 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 for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.

2) We have received much from God.

The Bible teaches us to count our blessings and be grateful to God in all circumstances.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 - "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

In our busy lives, how often do we stop and take stock of the blessings that God has given us? This is especially the case when we are confounded with economic uncertainties around us resulting from the unending COVID-19 pandemic over the last two years, and now with the global recession threat from the Russia-Ukraine war.

When faced with these circumstances, we often lose sight of God's hands in our lives and the hope that He brings in ending the "drought" that we are in.

The truth of the matter is that we will struggle to give and be generous from a position of lack. However, the measure of this "lack" should not be from a literal financial and human perspective.

God is less interested in the actual financial amount that we give, but our heart and posture in parting with our financial possessions, as highlighted in the familiar story of the widow and the two mites (Mark 12:41-44, Luke 21:1-4).

Therefore, often times, the "lack" that we have to deal with is not the lack of financial resources to give, but our lack of faith and trust that God is our ultimate provider.

Luke 16:10 - "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much."

Giving and being generous with our financial possessions, at every step of our journey, aligns our focus and gratitude towards God, and is a physical act that places our trust and faith in Him for every increase and blessing that have and will come our way.

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2 Corinthians 9:10-11 - “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. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.”

3) Money (and our physical wellbeing) matters to God.

Our God is a wholesome God who cares about our mental, emotional, spiritual as well as our physical well-being. The Bible acknowledges that faith alone without deeds to meet our physical needs will be equally futile.

James 2:14-17 - “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”

And in meeting physical needs for ourselves, our loved ones, and the community around us, money does matter and is needed in the Kingdom of God.

Therefore, it is no surprise that in the Bible, 15% of everything Christ ever said relates to the topic of money and possessions – more than His teachings on heaven and hell combined. Whilst the Bible in 1 Timothy 6:10 reminds us that “... the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil...”, it also teaches us that money used in the right way is a powerful tool to help those who are in need and in distress.

1 John 3:17 - “If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?”

Conclusion

As shared in recent weeks at church that “Soul work is Slow work”, developing a habit of giving and generosity is similarly a lifelong journey that requires commitment and a constant renewal of our faith in our living God.

As we work on growing the Fruit of the Spirit in our lives, let us pray that our giving and generosity towards the works in God’s Kingdom will also grow correspondingly.

In this era of electronic payments and virtual services, giving will no longer be confined to just physical monies being dropped into the offering buckets of our local church.

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With this flexibility and options available at our fingertips, choosing the right sowing ground becomes ever more important, in order to ensure our “soul work” progresses in tandem with our sowing.

Giving at a level that is far beyond our level of faith and understanding is not sustainable, and on the flip side, giving at a level that is below our faith causes our faith to stagnate over time.

Matthew 13:8 - “Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”

You are encouraged to take time and effort to understand the vision and the works that Collective is doing in furthering Christ’s Gospel by discussing and engaging with the church community and leaders who are around you.

Reflection/discussion:

- 1) Is my level of giving, both present and past, appropriate and commensurate with my level of faith and vice versa?
- 2) Do I have a good understanding on how my giving is helping the Collective further God’s kingdom works?