

# Generosity

18 August 2024

## INTRODUCING TODAY'S THEME

Today we're talking about **generosity**.

That's a big word that means how much of our lives are we willing to share with other people.

So I might have a lot of **toy cars** or **dolls** that I really like.

Am I happy to share those with someone else?

Or Mum might make me a great **lunch** to take to kinder or school with all the foods that I really like. But then my friend forgot to bring their lunch, so they don't have anything to eat.

Am I happy to share my lunch with my friend?

It means that I get less, but we both get something to eat.

If we're happy to share our things that's called being **generous**.

And God wants us to be generous because **God is generous to us**.

God provides what we need each day.

And God sent us Jesus to show us how to live.

Sometimes it's **hard to be generous**.

We want to hold on tight to what we have.

We clench our fists tight around what we have.

But it's hard to play and enjoy life if we walk around with our fists curled up all the time.

As we open our hands and share the love we have, we start to feel happy and we might even make some new friends!

## BIBLE READING

We listen for the word of the Lord.

**Our ears and our hearts are open.**

[Matthew 25:31-40](#)

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my

Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was ill and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.

The righteous will answer him, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison and go to visit you?”

The King will reply, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did for me.”

[Mark 12:41-44](#)

Jesus sat down in the Temple court opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the Temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.

Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, ‘Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything – all she had to live on.’

[2 Corinthians 8:1-12](#)

Now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord’s people. And they exceeded our expectations: they gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us. So we urged Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. 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.

I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you, through his poverty, might become rich.

And here is my judgment about what is best for you in this matter. Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.'

For the word of God in Scripture,  
for the word of God among us,  
for the word of God within us,  
**thanks be to God.**

## MESSAGE Generosity

Jesus was a great storyteller. One of the best known of all his stories was about a man travelling up from Jericho to Jerusalem who is mugged and left half dead on the side of the road.

Two well respected people see the man but choose not to get involved and continue on their journey. A third person, a Samaritan, deeply suspicious from a Jewish perspective, responds with compassion and stops to help the injured man and take him to an inn.

We often hear this story as all about compassion, but it's also a story about generosity. The Samaritan is generous with his care, generous with his time and generous with his money, agreeing to pay the inn keeper whatever is needed to help get the injured person back on his feet.

Jesus tells this story to illustrate what it means to love our neighbour and then invites others to go and act in a similar way.

Today we are exploring the practice of generosity and also celebrating SHARE Sunday when we remember and support the work of Uniting, which is the community services wing of the Uniting Church who strive to make a positive difference in the lives of individuals, families and communities.

In other words, to demonstrate love for neighbour in many practical ways.

What does generosity look like?

I'm sure that many of you could tell stories from your own life when you have shared generously or perhaps been on the end of a generous gift from someone else. As a community here at Croydon, we also like to think of ourselves as generous and we often are, especially at the time of funerals and other special events.

When I came down to the church on Friday, the first person I met was **Roy** who was here mowing the grass, generously offering his time and use of his mower. Playgroup was on and Anne and Glenys and Lorraine were helping Belinda, again showing generosity to the children and their families. I also picked up some frozen meals to take to someone, generously made by several ladies in the congregation.

This morning as we gather for worship, several people are offering their time and gifts and love to enhance our time together. Perhaps you could pause to thank them



afterwards?

People have brought along donations of food for Helping Hand and gifts of money to pay for the many costs of keeping the church and its various activities happening.



When we hear the word generous or generosity our first thought is often to think of money and finances. This is no doubt an important part of being generous and we'll be exploring this aspect of generosity shortly. But we can also be generous with our time, our homes, our love and with our faith.



The very first church that Liz and I were part of was Prahran Uniting Church, a small inner city congregation. Many of the members were young adults who were renting in the neighbourhood and were either students or just getting established in the workforce. Many of us were poor financially, but generous with food and hospitality and equipment, often swapping things across three share houses.

This small congregation also had oversight responsibility for a large inner city mission on Chapel Street with a budget that, in the 1980's ran into the millions. Among several ministries, it offered a community café and programs for people with mental illness.



It was an early form of partnership with UnitingCare.

Much of the funding for the various mission programs came from the government with additional support from other Uniting Church congregations. In the way of how these sorts of ministries have evolved over time, the Prahran congregation closed more than 20 years ago, while the community service programs of Uniting are continuing at the Chapel Street site.

-----

When it comes to what Christian generosity looks like, we take our first cues from the nature and example of God.

God is a generous giver – providing what we need day by day, sending Jesus to show us God's heart, and giving us grace and forgiveness, peace and hope.

The motivation is God's love.

The famous verse from John 3:16 puts it this way:

---

*God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. (John 3:16)*

---

So God's heart of love leads to generous action.

The early church community were known for both their generosity and compassion. The description of this community in Acts chapter 2 suggests that people would donate goods and even sell their possessions and distribute the money to anyone in need (Acts 2:44-45). This was a sign of God's generous Spirit at work among them.

Paul lists generosity as one of the fruits of the Spirit.

Despite these and other examples, we often struggle to be generous with our money and possessions. Why is this I wonder?

Scripture would suggest that part of the reason is that money has a real spiritual power in our lives.

Jesus taught that we can't serve both God and money.

We have to choose between the two.

We are constantly needing to fight against the human tendency – seen in the values of our society – towards selfishness and greed.

Here's a little test for you to do at home.

*When we say that we put God first in our lives or that God is central to our lives, is this actually reflected in how we allocate our money, our time, our other resources?*



When you think of your own giving habits, does your financial giving come first or is it near the bottom of the list if there's enough left over? Do you come close to the biblical standard of a tithe?

Of course things are quite difficult at the moment for many people with the price of seemingly everything going up and up, and our sources of income often being fixed.

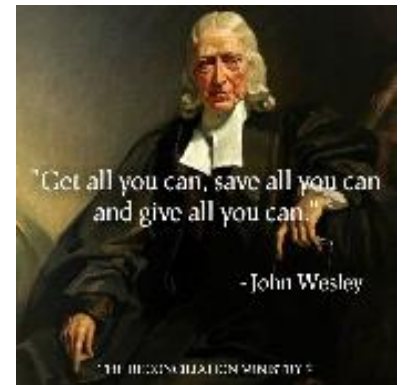
It's also true that we go through seasons of giving. At different seasons in our life we may be able to be more generous than at other times when we have bigger expenses and more demands.

John Wesley had a simple approach and encouraged people to gain all they can, save all they can, give all they can.

But perhaps it's only the rich who can afford to be generous?

Maybe, maybe not.

Jesus criticised wealthy Pharisees who proudly tithed their income and even their garden herbs, yet neglected to pursue justice and mercy. Sometimes we can give out of our plenty and not actually be particularly generous.



Conversely, Jesus praised the widow in one of today's readings who was quite poor and gave just a tiny amount of money – a few cents – yet was really very generous given her meagre income.

Again, it's true that we are more likely to be generous when we feel that the organisation or group that we are supporting is doing good and life-giving work, whether that's cataract surgery for people in Africa, or supporting asylum seekers in Australia who are denied any form of government assistance or whether it's donating food to Helping Hand who support people who are struggling in our local neighbourhood with some essentials for living.

Today we're being encouraged to think of the many programs run by Uniting that help the homeless, the hungry and those suffering from domestic violence. According to Jesus' parable of the sheep and the goats, we will be blessed if we reach out and help such people.

Let's watch a couple of short videos as leaders of some of these Uniting programs share about the programs they are supporting.



<https://youtu.be/aETEEvNTCEo>

<https://youtu.be/yrbB-sJBUuw>

A few **do's and don'ts** when it comes to giving and generosity:

- Do give because you love God and love your neighbour
- Do give because you have a heart for mission and a heart to help people
- Do give because you want to grow in your faith and trust in God

We attended a church in Africa where extremely poor people danced to the front of church to joyously give what they could, family by family. It was a highlight of their worship, this opportunity to give.

On the other hand:

- Don't give because you feel guilty or pressured. Often a message like this is followed by the offering time where a bowl is passed around with others watching what is put in, guilt-tripping the people. We are having a retiring offering after the service today to help the work of Uniting, but feel free to give a lot, a little or nothing at all.
- Don't give if you are living through a season of high financial demands or low income
- Don't give just because the Minister says it's a good thing to do. Instead seek God in prayer and seek God's wisdom and compassion

When we look around at the church, we often adopt a scarcity mindset that

our congregations are getting smaller,  
we are getting older

and there isn't much hope for the future.

We fear running out of people or money and feel we can't afford to be generous. Our hearts have shrunk.

Perhaps we don't really trust God to provide what we need.

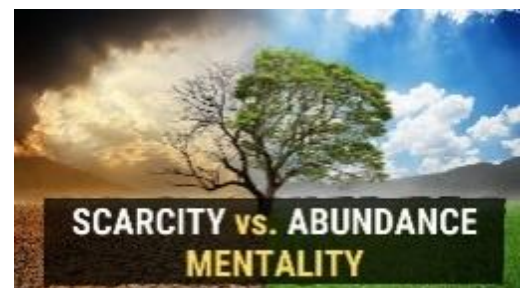
Perhaps we think that God is similar to us – a God of scarcity.



When I read the Scriptures, though, I see the opposite.

I see a God of abundance and provision who could feed a crowd of thousands from just a few pieces of bread and a couple of fish.

I see a God who delights to bestow gifts and blessings on God's people and who encourages





them to be generous in blessing others.

I see a God who wants us to be generous with our money ... but also generous with our time, our talents, our care and love, and in how we share the good news with others. A God who wants to enlarge our hearts.

Choosing to live generously is the opposite of being selfish and self-centred.

It's being prepared to trust God that God will provide what we need and more. It's being prepared to give back to our community and to build and invest for the future. And as we share what we have with others – generously, extravagantly even – we will often find deep fulfilment, joy and freedom.

Finally, a prayer. Let us pray ...

Help us God

when we have more than enough:

more than enough joy,  
more than enough peace,  
more than enough time,  
more than enough stuff,  
more than enough love.

Help us to share with those who don't have enough.

Lead us in your grace and generosity to be gracious and generous towards others.

Lead us in your abundant love to be abundantly loving towards others.

But Lord, there is so much to do,  
so many who need help,  
and there never seems enough time or resources.

We never seem to have enough creativity or answers,  
yet, we know that together we have more than enough,  
at least to make more than enough of a start,  
and we have more than enough opportunities  
to do what is right and good and generous each day.

Help us God.

Be more than enough for us,  
so that we can bless others abundantly.

Amen.