THE IMPORTANCE OF GENEROSITY

INTRODUCTION

So far in our prayer journey we've seen that love is made up of character traits we can work on like courage and diligence. Today our focus is on generosity. After all, how can you love like Jesus without being generous?

But we're not talking about money primarily. You can be barely scraping by, living pay check to check, behind on some of your bills, and still be a remarkably generous person. How so?

COMMENTARY: THE IMPORTANCE OF GENEROSITY

Even if you have very little money, you still have the same amount of time every day that a billionaire has. You have enough energy to spend on others, not just yourself— enough to put out the extra effort that an act of help or kindness requires. You have certain skills. Do you use them on yourself primarily? You have the ability to be interested in things. Do you show interest primarily in the things that interest you? Or do you show interest in things other people are interested in, even when you're not?

You see, you are rich with opportunities to help people. All around you are people who could use encouragement, friendly advice, helpful assistance, a little extra attention, someone to lean on, someone who shows gratitude, someone who listens.

Don't get hung up on whether you have much money. Generosity is not a matter of how much you give. Billionaires may give a million dollar gift, but that doesn't mean their million dollar gift qualifies as an act of generosity. *The true measure of generosity has to do with how much you keep for yourself, not how much you give to others.* Billionaires may give away millions, but they are making sure they still have more than all they could ever need.

Generous people are more concerned to give others the encouragement, advice, assistance, attention, or gratitude they need, even if they are not getting all they want for themselves. They don't sit around saying, "I don't get the gratitude, attention or help I need." Generous people simply don't prioritize themselves.

You can also recognize a generous person by questions they never ask:

- *How much can I give and still have as much as I want for myself?*
- *Will this person show gratitude if I am generous to them?*
- *Has the person done anything deserving of my help?*
- *Will my generosity of time, energy, attention, or thoughtfulness pay off in some way? Will I get anything in return, even if only a good feeling?*

You see, the bottom line is this: **GENEROSITY IS...gladly giving what others did not earn, deserve, expect or require.**

REFLECTION:

Now think of this definition in relation to what we know about Jesus. This kind of generosity is definitely a characteristic of His love. Who has ever ***earned*** or ***deserved*** the grace and kindness of God? Think about our definition of generosity in relation to what the apostle Paul wrote.

> **At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. (Titus 3:3-5)**

- Notice: What others ***did not expect or require.*** No one has a right to expect or require anything that isn't owed to them. If someone does something for you because they owe it, that's not

generosity. That's paying a debt. Jesus owed us nothing. On the contrary, we owed the Lord everything. We are so deeply in debt we could never pay Him back. But He still gave up everything for us.

- Notice: ***Gladly giving.*** The Bible says that Jesus laid down His life freely for us. No one took it from Him. And what's, more it says:

  Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross. (Hebrews 12:2)

His love is incredibly generous. Clearly, if we want to devote our lives to Him and love others like He did, while we can never match Him, we move closer in likeness to Him by pursuing true generosity. With all this in mind, take a few moments to consider these questions.

- **Who is the most generous person you know? Why do you say that?** Don't just settle for the generic, "He'd give you the shirt off his back." Think of specific reasons and ways he or she shows generosity.
- **Look at the following categories. In which of these ways are you most generous? In which of these ways are you least generous?**
  - Giving money or gifts
  - Giving time
  - Putting out energy
  - Giving your attention
  - Showing interest in someone else's interest when it's not that interesting to you.
  - Sharing your skills or knowledge
  - Acts of thoughtfulness or kindness
  - Offering help without being asked
  - Offering understanding and forgiveness
- **Who might you need to be more generous toward? A specific person? Or a category of persons?**

PRAYER:

Dear Lord, there's no way I could ever match Your generosity. After all, people drove spikes through Your hands and feet, but with generosity of spirit You still said, "Father, forgive them..." While we were still sinners and Your enemy, You died for us. I can never match Your generosity, but I want to move in that direction with all my heart. So help me start with my attitude toward others. Help me practice generosity of spirit. Help me be understanding toward those whose ideas and behaviors trouble me. Help me give patient responses to those who frustrate me. Help me offer help even to those who tend to neglect their responsibilities. Help me to express thanks to those who never thank me. These are the kind of places I want to start, because this kind of generosity requires no money, no special abilities, no extra time or energy. Just a willing spirit. Put within me a willing spirit. There's nothing that keeps me from being generous in these situations except a stingy attitude. I guess that's where I can start. I'll practice not being as stingy with a good attitude toward people who are hard to love. But like I said, "Help!" In the name of Jesus, Amen.