

“For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9).

These five practices of fruitful congregations – radical hospitality, passionate worship, intentional faith development, risk taking mission and service, extravagant generosity - are interconnected and all are essential. By repeating, improving, and deepening these practices, our church can fulfill the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. We invite and welcome people, all God to shape hearts and minds in worship, offer opportunities for people to grow in grace and in the knowledge of God, providing channels for service to relieve suffering, and help people grow in the grace of giving.

Why do you give? Because we

- love God
- love the church
- desire to grow in love of neighbor

The apostle Paul had a desire to help the Church of Jerusalem, which was the Mother Church. At that time (about A.D 55-56) Jerusalem church was poor, and it was Paul's desire that all the Gentiles' Churches should remember and help that Church which was their mother in the faith. So here he urges the Corinthians to participate in this act of generosity, which is one of characteristics of Christian life.

Paul tells them how generous the Macedonian Churches had been. They were poor and in trouble but they gave all they had, far more than anyone could have expected; they gave themselves to God first and to them.

As we grow in relationship to Christ, we grow also in the practice of Extravagant Generosity, offering more of ourselves for the purpose of Christ and providing the resources that strengthen ministry and mission of the church. Vibrant, fruitful, growing church practice extravagant generosity, giving joyously, generously, and consistently as a response to God's love and will.

Generous: willing to give more money, time etc. to help someone than is expected; liberal in giving or sharing; marked by abundance and ample.

“You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity” (2 Corinthians 9:11); Take from among you an offering to the LORD; let whoever is of a generous heart bring the LORD's offering” (Exodus 35:5); Honor the LORD with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce” (Proverbs 3:9).

Generous Act of God in Christ

The infinite nature of God's gracious love is manifest in the gift we have received in Christ: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” (John 3:16). The followers of Jesus see in the gracious and costly gift of his sacrifice and death the ultimate self-revelation of God. Giving reflects the nature of God as well as your faith and love to God. Growing in

the grace of giving is a response Christian disciples offer to God's call to make a difference in the world.

Paul describes generosity as one of the fruit of the Spirit, alongside love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22). Paul commends the generosity of communities of faith, especially those who remain surprisingly extravagant in their giving during difficult time. He says, "for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part." They "gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints" (2 Cor. 8:2-4)

We Americans live in an extraordinarily materialist and consumerist society. Culture tells us to buy more and bigger, and fosters the myth that self-worth is found in material wealth and that happiness is found in possessing... Millions of couples struggle under oppressive levels of debt that strain marriages, destroy happiness, and intensify conflict and anxiety. As one radio show host says, "We buy things we don't even need with money we don't even have to impress people we don't even know" (*The Dave Ramsey Show*).

There is a story about a group of little boys in a Sunday school class. The teacher was trying to impress upon them the needs of a missionary and how they could help. She proposed to them, "Why don't we give the missionary who's coming to us a million dollars? They all cheered. "Why don't we just give that missionary a hundred thousand dollars?" she asked again. They thought that would be so exciting. "How about a thousand dollars?" she asked. Again they thought that would be a good idea. Then she said, "What if we each gave the missionary one dollar?" One little boy said, "Oh, no! Oh, no!" When the teacher asked why not, he said, "Because I have a dollar!"

We have been the recipients of grace upon grace...Generosity is a fruit of the Spirit, a worthy spiritual aspiration. Generosity is the opposite of selfishness, self-centeredness, and self-absorption. To practice Extravagant Generosity requires self-control, patience, kindness, faith, and love of God and neighbor...Giving changes both the giver and the church.

There's a story about an eighty-year-old man who was found by his friend to be planted a very small short tree. The friend asked, "What kind of tree is that?" "Why, that's a peach tree," he said. "I love to eat peaches." His friend said, "You're a crazy fool. You'll never live to see that tree bear fruit. What do you think you're doing?" The man replied, "Somebody planted peach trees, and I love peaches. I've been eating peaches all my years because somebody planted peach trees. And so I am planting this peach tree for somebody else to enjoy the fruit of this tree in the future." – Christian spirit

God's eternal love revealed in Christ is the source of our self-worth; true happiness and meaning are found in growing in grace and in the knowledge and love of God. The practice of Extravagant Generosity is the fruit of maturation in Christ, the result of God's sanctifying grace that molds our hearts and changes our values and behaviors.

Here's top ten list of benefits...

1. Freedom from materialism, serve God not money!
2. Freedom to draw nearer to God, nothing to distract!
3. Freedom to explore deeper the riches of God
4. Strengthens my faith
5. Investment for eternity
6. Blesses me in return

7. It makes me happy to be growing in faith, proving my obedience

8. Needs are met in Jesus' name, others are blessed.

9. Sense more love from others in Christ.

10. Grace of God flow through me. May the overflowing grace of generosity abide in you!

Amen.