

**DEVOTED TO GENEROSITY**

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Series: Devoted to...  
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Scripture  
Acts 2: 41-46,

I really believe we are living through a time that will shape our generation. The conversations are all over the place. And whether you agree with them or not, there is no denying that they are generation shapers.

For this reason, I will not stop emphasising that the church is being invited, you are being invited to take your place firmly in the story of God as we are taking part in shaping this generation. And we don't need to wait for permission as we have both the power and authority from Jesus.

So in doing that I have turned our focus to the devotions of the early church. I have been captivated by this word devotion because it denotes that they did all they could, they gave themselves completely to these things.

These devotions shaped the church and the church went on to shape the world. But they had to make these devotions because they, like us, lived in a world that would not encourage these in any way.

Nothing in our world will encourage us to be together despite diving walls of tongue, tribe, nation and race. Nothing in our culture is waiting for permission to shape our worldview and so we have to intentionally devote ourselves to God's word to let it shape us and how we view the world.

Today we look at a different devotion of the early church.

*The community continually devoted themselves to learn what the apostles taught them, gathering for fellowship, breaking bread, and praying. Everyone felt a sense of awe because the apostles were doing many signs and wonders among them. There was an intense sense of togetherness among all who believed; they shared all their material possessions in trust. They sold any possessions and goods that did not benefit the community and used the money to help everyone in need. They were unified as they worshipped at the temple day after day. In homes, they broke bread and shared meals with glad and generous hearts. The new disciples praised God, and they enjoyed the goodwill of all the people of the city. Day after day the Lord added to their number everyone who was experiencing liberation.*

**Acts 2:42-46**

The guys and girls devoted themselves to generosity shared all material possessions in trust. They sold any possessions and goods that did not benefit the community and used the

money to help everyone in need. For them giving to those in need was not about convenience but something they committed themselves to.

I have mentioned before a big council meeting that the early church had to discuss an issue that was potentially dividing them. There was once a very big debate about what to do about all the non-jews who were beginning to follow Jesus. They did not eat with the same rules that Jews did. They did not live by the same rules that Jews did and most importantly they did not circumcise their males.

So there was a big debate that led to a big meeting with all the leaders of the early church. And after much prayer and conversation, they felt that the Holy Spirit was leading them to not put any unnecessary restrictions on the believers. The point was to make them followers of Jesus, not to make them Jewish.

So the leaders of the church, you know all the big names we know: Peter, James, Paul, they write a pastoral letter to the churches especially one that was had so many non-jews amongst jews.

Here is how Paul later reports this particular conversation and what was addressed to him as the one who was leading the charge amongst non-Jews

*When James, Cephas (whom you know as Peter), and John—three men purported to be pillars among the Jewish believers—saw that God’s favour was upon me to fulfil this calling, they welcomed and endorsed[b] both Barnabas and me. They agreed that our ministries would work as two hands, theirs advancing the mission of God among the Jews and ours toward the outsider nations, all with the same message of redemption. In parting, they requested we always remember to care for the poor among us, which was something I was eager to do.*

#### **Galatians 2:9-10**

“In parting, they asked me to always remember to care for the poor among us”, Paul says. And you know, he comes later in the story. And his planting of churches even later. It seems to me that the devotion of the church to take care of those in need in the community not only continued but was so important that they desired to see that every new community planted made this a priority.

Generosity for a believer is a way of life. Partly it is a way to reflect the heart of God, who is a generous father. Too generous to not only provide but to even lay down his life for us. Too generous that he lavishly pours out the Holy Spirit who then blesses the church with all manner of spiritual gifts.

I think one of the things that clearly demonstrates the heart of God to the church and the world around us is generosity to one another and the world around us.

This church compound has always been open to anyone in need of help. And I have seen so many people walk through our gates just wanting a meal or a little help to get them to the next step in a job application or rent on their home or a hospital bill.

And 3 of the ones I have encountered personally will always remain in my mind. The first one because he thought we were part of some secret society and promised to do anything I ask of him if I would let him join. After a couple of encounters, he did give his life to Jesus. I kept telling him, we got Jesus here, that is all we are about.

The other 2 were Muslims who gave their lives to Jesus and the first point of contact was this church being generous. One of them when he finally was able to see me moved me to tears as he described how kind and compassionate people here had been to him. Not the pastor, just everyday people who work here. From the security personnel to the cleaning staff. It's become a culture here that hungry people will walk in and be fed that no one needs the authorisation to do and oftentimes, they will do it with their own funds.

So for this guy, it was so moving that even when some in his family would not help him all the people who had been generous to him were believers in Jesus and somehow he ended up at Trinity and that continued. It moved him. So not just people attached to us, but believers elsewhere had been generous to him.

So I remember, thinking, 'it's the end of the day, I am tired. Let's get you what you are asking for and part ways.' And he stops me before I leave the room and says it was more than that. He wanted to give his life to Jesus.

Listen, we are not called to generosity as some sort of tool to get people giving their lives to Jesus. And sure that happens. We are generous because God our father is generous and he has been generous with us.

But hey, nothing in our culture will encourage generosity. You know to be generous you have to deny yourself. From what you have, you gotta give some away. There is a joy that comes with being part of someone else joy because you were generous. Seeing them light up or tear up with gratitude or disbelief that anyone would share anything with them. Or just the joy of joining our father in being generous.

Yet, we cannot get to that joy until we overcome the obstacles in our culture that discourage generosity.

We are surrounded by ads and marketing that makes us feel like all we should do is acquire more. What we have is never enough.

The "Play Station 5" is now in the market. My 'Play Station 3' just became very inadequate. It was okay until this week's announcement. Now I just want a 4 but I am open to gifts of a 5.

A culture that is centred around the individual even more. Well, it's mine. I worked for it. They should work a little harder.

But we are in the world but not of the world. So one of our devotions should be to be generous. It should form the very DNA of the church and believers.

So the early church had everything in the community then they sold property and goods that did not benefit the community to give those in need.

This seems to me like radical, habitual and spontaneous generosity.

Radically generous in the sense that it was everyone. That would be against the culture that wants to make us judges of who deserves generosity. Radical in the sense that they even sold possessions to make sure they had money available to help.

Look around your house. You got some really nice stuff some of you. Imagine having to sell some of that because you have to be generous to someone.

Not that we should not have stuff and savings in our account and investments: it's living a life of radical generosity that if it came to it, we will part with possessions to be generous.

Their generosity was habitual. This is just what the church always did. It was not just something they did at the start. They told Paul, this you must do even as you continue ministering the Kingdom of God in non-Jewish cities.

And guess what, this continued to mark the church that is shocked unbelievers around them. The ancient world was surprised by this band of people who believed in a man called Jesus who they knew had been crucified by Rome. But they stopped worshipping all other gods and would only worship and sing to Jesus.

And Get this, it was so important for them to be kind and generous that they fed the hungry among them and even those who did not believe. The church took care of their orphaned and the orphaned of those who did weren't believers. It shocked so many.

This has been a marking culture of the church throughout its history. Even during times when church history was marked with so many regrettable things like the crusades, believers opened hospitals that served exhausted travellers and sick people in their communities. One of the older ones being the St. John's Hospital.

Church has opened schools to teach children all over the world in majority Christian nations and in nations that were not and or even hostile to Christianity.

Believers have built and led homes for orphans and abandoned children all across the world, For teenage moms and rescue homes for people freed from sexual slavery.

Some believers, like Mother Teresa, left their lives behind to live among the poor and serve them.

Its radicle, and it is habitual, it is our response to the calling to be like our father. Will you do all it takes?

Andy Stanley, a pastor from Georgia, often encourages people to radically change the way they view their finances in this way. That the only way to live right is to radically change our budgeting so that generosity is part of our lives and not an afterthought.

While the world will tell you to live, save then give. Andy encourages believers to flip that upside down. Give first, save then live on the rest.

This is consistent with the teaching of scripture even from the Old Testament. Not only did you give your firstfruits as an offering to God, but you would also give a tithe. Which is usually 10%.

And what I have often said is that tithing is a powerful blessing to the giver. Tithing is not God asking something from you but wanting something for you. Know this, God loves unconditionally. Whether you give or not.

And it breaks my heart to see people tithe as some way of getting God to give back to them. And yes, there are numerous stories of people seeing incredible financial blessing as they tithe or even as they live generously within their communities. But this is not the motivation to give and is not always how it happens.

The invitation to give is not to put God in some box where he owes us: rather it is taking part in spiritual blessing where we trust God. We are fully surrendered to him. We are training our hearts to not be attached to possessions and getting free from the hold money often has on people's hearts. We are choosing to be part of the community of faith in support of the things it does.

And the thing is they devoted themselves to generosity, each according to their means. So if you are having trouble giving 10%, start small. Yet some of you can give more than 10%.

But generosity is beyond our tithing. See, we are called to be disciples both as a community and as displaced of Jesus. So don't let your generosity end with tithing. Live generously both through and as the church and as an individual disciple. Feed someone, call someone, call someone, care for the least of these.

Unfortunately, sometimes it is easier for people to give to organisations and churches and in some places because it is tax-deductible. Easier than it is for them to answer the call from their neighbour and their immediate family. It is easier sometimes even for people to help a total stranger and leave their own family in trouble. You see these 2 go hand in hand.

Paul says if we cannot take care of our own families we are worse than non-believers. Let your generosity in time and possession starts at home. Be generous to your wife, your husband, your kids, your neighbours, those who are called "the opposite other" in your own nation.

Often this is harder because there is proximity. When we know them and they are close to us we somehow feel we know their story and why they are in the position they are in. We know why they do not deserve our generosity and we use that as an excuse to not be generous.

Yet it is in proximity that our own hearts are transformed. Being generous to those who our culture, economic policy and politics would not say they got themselves to be where they are. When we are generous with people very close to us even when we are getting tired of that phone ringing. Your immediate neighbour of that other tribe or race. That proximity allows us to be close to Jesus. To see his own compassion and generosity towards u. And it

allows us to be in a position for the Holy Spirit to confront so any attitudes in our own hearts. But these two are both ends of the Kingdom of God and should be held in tension.

Generosity as a community and as individuals.

Generosity here and far

Will, you radically rearrange your finances to make generosity a priority? Will you devote yourself to radicle, habitual and spontaneous generosity?

Let's pray