



ENTER God's presence

Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits – who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies you with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

- Psalm 103:1-5

Lord Jesus you said, "I am the bread of life, whoever comes to me will never go hungry." So we come before you, hungry and expectant, to receive again the life giving and life transforming grace and truth of your word. Fill us again with your words of eternal life and prepare us to share that word eagerly and generously with others. Amen.



SHARE life together

1. **How have you seen Jesus at work in your life this week, in your highs and your lows?**
2. **Share how you went with your living purposefully from last time?**
3. **What is the most satisfying meal you have ever eaten? What made it so satisfying?**
4. **What is one achievement you have made in your life which you tend to 'boast' about?**

Are you the total package? Do you have all the necessary components for success in life? IQ, EQ, PQ, SQ, CQ? IQ - the intelligence to comprehend ideas and process information. EQ - high self-awareness and ability to control your emotions in difficult situations. PQ - your ability to provide value in your position and be reliable. SQ - the social intelligence to read the emotions of others and interact accordingly and fit into the culture and environment around you. CQ - the cultural quotient - aware of and able to embrace differences in others. A good measure of these quotients in your life will provide a solid foundation for your future and lead to satisfaction in life...so they say. The problem is as we measure those things, we always view them in comparison to others. Either we are superior than others, or lacking in comparison to others. Both responses are incorrect! Paul tells us that the only measure that leads to real contentment, transformation and fulfilment in life is the WQ and GQ. An awareness of these two quotients at work in your life and through your life becomes the very point at which you will discover the deepest satisfaction of generosity.

Week beginning
Sunday 3rd October 2021

Worship series: Authentic Generosity



VERSE for the week

But he [the Lord] said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weakness, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

2 Corinthians 12:9



REMEMBER this week

God doesn't use weak people despite their weaknesses; he demonstrates his perfect power through their weaknesses to reveal his grace and generosity to the world.



LISTEN attentively

Read 2 Corinthians 10:7-18

- 5. What stands out for you in this text? What questions does it raise for you?**
- 6. What do you think Paul is saying in verse 12 when he says, “When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise”?**
- 7. Paul also talks a lot here about motive. What do you think Paul’s motive is for ‘boasting in the Lord’? What motive do you think those who compare themselves with others have for their boasting?**

This idea was touched on earlier in the series on generosity, namely that one of the biggest hurdles for having a sense of satisfaction is comparison. A pastor shared a story of two young boys who had been out helping their dad in the garden on a hot summer day. After an hour or so of work, mum called the boys inside, enticing them into the cool of the house with the offer of a bowl of icecream. After washing up, the younger of the two boys arrived in the kitchen and was joyfully excited as his mother handed him a bowl with two big scoops of icecream, complete with chocolate topping and sprinkles. Moments later the older boy joined his brother on the porch with his own bowl of icecream, which contained 3 scoops. As the younger boy compared his two scoops with his older brother’s three, the joy and satisfaction which the treat had initially brought him was suddenly replaced with jealousy and a sense of injustice and indignation at the unfairness of the situation. It’s a simple illustration but it highlights how easily and quickly, even as adults, we can go from being content and satisfied with our lot, until we encounter someone who, in our opinion, has more but deserves it less than we do.

- 8. Share a time when your satisfaction with a purchase or a decision suddenly evaporated when you realised a newer or better option had become available?**

Unfortunately comparison has been made so much easier these days by virtue of social media. Where as in the past you may have compared yourself to your immediate neighbours, some close friends or workmates or maybe your favourite celebrities, these days you can instantly compare your life to any of the one billion active monthly Instagram users or any of the 2.85 billion users on Facebook. This is the kind of comparison which Paul says is unwise, comparing ourselves with ourselves. After all, often what we see on Instagram and Facebook is not a full or accurate picture.

- 9. Why do you think that we are so quick to compare ourselves or even our churches to other people or churches? What benefit do we hope to gain by doing this?**
- 10. Who are you most likely to go to when you want a completely honest and frank assessment or opinion about something?**



GROW deeper

Have a look at 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

Paul begins chapter 12 by insisting that he will continue to boast. For the most part, boasting is usually an attempt to gain additional favour, honour or respect from others. It is a tool or device commonly used by people who hunger for more than what they currently have. It hints at a dissatisfied heart. It is the reason social media has been so successful. Social media creates a space where we can each promote only the best parts of ourselves and our lives. It allows us to curate for ourselves little shrines or museums to our own greatest achievements and to set up for ourselves and for the rest of the world a monument to our own greatness.

What is unique about Paul is that he wants to boast about his weakness and his flaws. He does that because he knows the deep reality of who he is. Paul knows that apart from Christ, his own life would amount to nothing. Yet even Paul identifies and admits the risk that he may become conceited and arrogant because of all the things God has been doing through his ministry.

11. In what parts of your life might you be taking credit for what God has done?

12. How might recognising and boasting in our weaknesses help us to develop a greater sense of generosity and satisfaction?

When we find satisfaction only in our own 'greatness' then we will always be left working, striving and hungering for more success, more authority, more 'greatness'. It leads to the kind of life which Mick Jagger and the Rolling Stones sang about, a life where "I can't get no satisfaction." However, when our satisfaction rests on God's greatness, there is nothing greater to chase after, nothing greater to achieve. He has given it all to us in Christ and we can rightly boast of all that he has done and all the he has given to us. Paul reminds us again today that $WQ + GQ = SQ$. WQ (my weakness quotient) + GQ (God quotient or grace quotient) = SQ (not social quotient but strength and satisfaction) Jesus puts it this way in John 15:5 ***Apart from me you can do nothing!*** WQ is being aware that I am nothing with Christ. GQ - is an awareness that God is everything and gives me everything. When I live with that awareness, his grace in my weakness, I not only have satisfaction in life but strength to live generously in every circumstance.



LIVE purposefully

Most of us probably have some work to do before we will be comfortable boasting about our weaknesses but generosity will lead us in the right direction. Generosity redirects our thinking from boasting and getting more, to humility and giving more. Time and again studies have shown the greater joy and satisfaction that humans get from the act of giving rather than receiving. What greater witness to Jesus could we show than to like him, give everything we are for the sake of others. What Christ has done for us is the only act worth boasting about, everything else apart from it is insignificant and meaningless.

13. Success can sometimes lead to arrogance and misplaced pride. How do we guard against that when it comes to our success either in our personal lives or in our attempts at mission as a community of faith?

14. In Chapter 12, Paul talked about boasting about the work of God in the lives of others. What ways has God acted in your life that you could 'boast' about which might help people to see how great God is? How might you go about inviting other people to share their stories of God's work in their life with you?



PRAY intentionally

- Praise God for his greatness, his grace, and his generosity.
- Pray for the church around the world, that it would always recognize it's weakness and come to rely ever more on the greatness of God. Pray for the LCA Bishop Elect, Paul Smith, that he might know the grace and strength of God in his weaknesses.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to enable you to boast about the goodness of God in all circumstances.
- Pray for those who find themselves in the trap of comparing themselves to others that they come to know the truth of who they are in Christ.



BLESS one another

You might like to address one person in your group and make the sign of the cross in the air as you say...

[Name], in your weaknesses, God is strong. Amen.