



ENTER God's presence

But I am like an olive tree flourishing in the house of God; I trust in God's unfailing love for ever and ever. For what you have done I will always praise you in the presence of your faithful people. And I will hope in your name, for your name is good.

- Psalm 52:8-9

Heavenly Father, we know that all good things ultimately come from you. As we now gather around your word, may we come to know more of your love and generosity towards us and may that knowledge grow in us hearts that long to be more generous and loving to others and bring glory to your holy name. 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 inspiring act of generosity you have ever witnessed?**
4. **Does the generosity of others ever move you to be more generous? Share.**

When the going gets tough, Australians step up! That's the finding of a survey conducted to ascertain the impact of crisis on the public's propensity to give. What it discovered was Australians are inspired to go above and beyond their normal giving in times of drought, bushfire and flood. But what about when crisis hits the whole community, like we are experiencing in these sustained pandemic times? When things get tight, giving seems unwise or even impossible.

That's what makes the giving of the Macedonian church even more inspiring. They were going through some tough times and Paul notes their "severe trial" and "extreme poverty." They had almost nothing to spare. And yet, they begged Paul for the privilege of giving and gave generously, "even beyond their ability." What inspired their generosity even when they had nothing and were under pressure themselves? That's what we will explore today as we focus on 'The Inspiration of Generosity'. It's an attitude and posture that can help you "excel" in your giving too.

Week beginning
Sunday 12th September 2021

Worship series:
Authentic Generosity



VERSE for the week

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake became poor, so that you, through his poverty might become rich.

2 Corinthians 8:9



REMEMBER this week

In a world that values
Go-getters,
God is calling you to be a
Go-giver!
Generosity is the proof of
love and an expression of
the Gospel in action.



LISTEN attentively

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-15

5. **What do you find inspiring/challenging/confusing about the text? Share.**
6. **Towards the end of this passage, Paul talks about 'equality' being the ultimate goal. Are 'equality' and 'fairness' the same thing? How do you think our world today assesses fairness or equality?**
7. **What emotion or 'feeling' does this particular passage leave you with after you have heard it?**

Rarely when we are faced with the question of fairness do we really stop to think about others. Our sense of fairness or equality usually revolves around what we perceive to be fair or unfair for us and our families. Anyone who has had the privilege of raising children will tell you that after learning to speak, one of the earliest phrases most children will learn and then repeat consistently to their parents is the phrase, 'that's not fair'. That sense of fairness doesn't seem to leave us as we get older.

But what is really interesting about equality or fairness, is how we can often be cruising along thinking that the world is treating us pretty fairly until we make a comparison of some sort with someone who has more than us. Has that ever happened to you? You generally find yourself content with the cards that life has dealt you right up until you encounter someone who has it all and doesn't seem to have ever had to lift a finger to get it. The little child in all of us can't help but shout, "that's not fair!"

8. **Share a time when comparison has shaken your contentment with what you have?**

The key for us is perspective and it is the tool which Paul uses as he writes to the Corinthians. When we compare our situation with those around us who have more or who are having an easier time of things than us, our capacity to act generously can become almost non-existent. We only manage to focus on what we do not have and so our generosity, or lack thereof, is motivated by a sense of scarcity and of lack. Whereas Paul encourages and inspires generosity by forcing a comparison with those who were already doing it tough; the Macedonians, who were experiencing 'a severe trial and extreme poverty', but were still generously giving what they had. In comparison, the Corinthians probably had it pretty good as Corinth was a wealthy city and an important trade hub. So in comparison to the Macedonians who had almost nothing, these Corinthians had every reason to be grateful for the abundant provision of God and to freely share it in response to his goodness to them.

9. **What comparisons do you find yourself making in your life? How do they effect your contentment and your generosity?**



GROW deeper

This week we focus on the inspiration for generosity. In many ways it is not a lot different to the foundation of generosity. We are often inspired by grand gestures and big events. In Australia we are often inspired by big emergencies or crises. We give generously to bush fire appeals, flood recovery efforts, drought relief, etc. When we see people doing it tough Australians are pretty generous. But what about when the crisis is more universal. What about during Covid-19 pandemic restrictions? What happens to our generosity when we are the ones feeling the pinch? Where does our inspiration for generosity come from then?

Look a little more closely at 2 Corinthians 8:1-5

In the example of the Macedonians we find people inspired to generosity even in the midst of severe trial and poverty. Here we see a group of people who, according to Paul, 'gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God, also to us'. The inspiration for their generosity did not come from themselves but was rather a response inspired by the generous grace and mercy of God expressed through the gift of his son Jesus Christ.

10. How do you usually think about God? Is it easy for you to recognise him as generous? Why/why not?

No one is likely to perform a greater act of generosity toward you or anyone else for that matter, than God's sacrifice of himself on the cross for your sake. Yes, highly skilled and highly paid doctors might take time without pay to serve those who would otherwise go without the health care they might need, some altruistic lawyers might take on a pro bono case if they feel a great injustice has been done. Maybe one day we might even see high powered CEO's and politicians take a pay cut for the sake of their shareholders or the national economy, but remember this, Christ died for us while we were still sinners. Even while we were still his enemies and had turned our backs on God, he reached out to us, offering his own life for ours. Now that we are his sons and daughters through Christ, how much more can we trust him to be generous towards us and to meet our every need?



LIVE purposefully

As Paul said in the last few verses of this passage, the goal of generosity is not that you go without while others mooch off your generosity. What Paul is saying is that God gives enough to meet every need, sometimes he just asks us to distribute it where it needs to go. Do you remember the book which was made into a movie back in the early 2000's called '*Pay it Forward*'. The idea was that a young boy set out to change the world by being kind and generous to three people and rather than paying him back, he asked each of the three people to pay the kindness forward to three more people. How will you 'pay forward' God's generosity to you this week?

11. Try starting your own 'pay it forward' experiment this week but here's the catch. There are no strings attached! Find three people who you could do something significantly generous for during the week (you may not know them yet). See how inspirational authentic generosity can be, bringing you joy and inspiring others to generosity.



PRAY intentionally

- Praise God for his abundant gifts and blessings to us.
- Thank God for the ultimate and inspiring generosity he showed in offering Jesus on the cross for our sake. Ask that the reality of the Good News of Jesus might inspire you to act with generosity towards others.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to always draw your perspective to Jesus and to remind you of all that you have been given through his life, death, and resurrection.
- Pray for a growth in global generosity, that we might all show more care and concern for those who are experiencing severe trials and poverty.



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], you are rich in Christ. Amen.