



ENTER God's presence

The Lord detests dishonest scales, but accurate weights find favour with him. The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity. One person gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.

- Proverbs 11 (selected verses)

Heavenly Father, all your promises are Yes and Amen! You are faithful to us, your people, and abounding in steadfast love. As we gather again around your word of truth, may it refresh us and help us to better reflect your love, faithfulness and generosity in our lives so that others might recognize and encounter your grace in and through us. 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. If you made a promise to yourself, how confident would you be that you would keep it?
4. If you have a social media presence, how well does it portray the 'real you'?

In our world of conflicting arguments and competing narratives, of fake news & conspiracy theories...Whom do you trust? I'll trust a pilot to get me from A to B on time & in 1 piece. I'll trust a Doctor, dentist, hair stylist once...sometimes I have no choice. But if I really have skin in the game...I want to know who I am dealing with. Trust is personal. Trust is hard to earn and easy to lose.

So when Paul encourages the disciples of Jesus in Corinth to give generously toward helping people they've never met and from whom they are unlikely to receive a return, he wants to make sure they trust his motives and his mission. Trust is personal. Paul assures the Corinthians they can rely on his integrity and those chosen to assist in his ministry. They can count on the gifts they give reaching the destination he has promised. They can trust Paul, because they've been entrusted by God with rich blessings, and an eternal promise.

Week beginning
Sunday 19th September 2021

Worship series: Authentic Generosity



VERSE for the week

We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal gift. For we are taking great pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of man.

2 Corinthians 8:20-21



REMEMBER this week

Transparency and trust enable the pipeline of generosity to flow freely and to bless the people for whom God intends it.

Living generously is not a spur of the moment, spontaneous, off the cuff reactive impulse to a pressure situation. It's a well-planned, wisely administered proactive lifestyle that arises out of the deep convictions you have about God's love for you and his commission to demonstrate that love to others. The careful, transparent, spiritual administration of the grace of generosity is critical to seeing generosity flow where God wants it to have the most transforming influence.



LISTEN attentively

Read 2 Corinthians 8:16 – 9:5

5. **What stands out for you in this text? What questions does it raise for you?**
6. **In this passage, Paul certainly gives Titus a glowing recommendation to the people in Corinth. If you were sent somewhere as a representative of your church, what would your church leaders be able to say to recommend you?**
7. **What are some of the ways that the church has been criticised more recently? Have these criticisms been fair or largely unfounded?**

Franciscan priest, Brennan Manning once said,

“The greatest single cause of atheism in the world today is Christians: who acknowledge Jesus with their lips, walk out the door, and deny Him by their lifestyle. That is what an unbelieving world simply finds unbelievable.”

There is something important about the way we conduct our selves and our business as Christians. Too often the world is presented with a picture of the church which is riddled with dishonesty, controversy and abuse of power. While some people might say, ‘Well what do you expect? No church is perfect and every church is full of sinners!’ and while that might be true to an extent, Jesus and the apostle Paul certainly seem to expect a little more from the church.

8. **Paul sends well respected, well trained, and well known servants of the church to work with the Corinthians and to administer their gift of generosity to the church in Jerusalem. What difference do you think a well respected leader can actually have? Do you have any real world examples?**
9. **In chapter 9 it also seems that the Corinthians have already made some kind of pledge to provide some financial support to the church in Jerusalem. Paul seems to be reminding them of their promise of aid. How often do your promises get ‘accidentally’ forgotten or broken?**

Ultimately Godly administration comes down to a matter of integrity. We are all aware of various charities or not-for-profit organisations, even some politicians, that have found themselves in hot water over the years misusing funds which had been provided to them in good faith. We all know the damage that is caused when that kind of trust is broken. God has given us so much more than just wealth. In fact, when Paul talks about ‘carrying the offering’ in 8:19, the word used there for offering comes from the same Greek word used for grace. The way we administer God's grace in and through our lives is more than just a matter of how we manage money.



GROW deeper

Have a look at Matthew 5:33-37 and Romans 12:1-8

There are two important things for us to think about when it comes to ‘administering generosity’. Firstly, our walk needs to match our talk. This brings us back to the quote from Brennan Manning earlier. Why on earth would anyone want to be part of a faith or religion which constantly talks about love, grace, and forgiveness when the members of that faith are continually seen to be acting contrary to those ideals? We don't need to make a big show about our integrity, to prove how ‘transformed’ we are now that Jesus has become a part of our lives. As we all know from personal experience, there will be times when we fail to live the way we know God wants us to. But if we are always hoping to show an attitude of love and grace, hopefully that is what will mostly be seen. That will help people be more receptive to the grace which we have to share.

10. What areas of life do you find it easier or harder to 'walk the talk'? How can good Christian community and good Christian leadership help in this regard?

The second key to administering the generous gift of grace that God has given us through Jesus, is in faithfully using the gifts he has given us. Just like charities and politicians are expected to use the money for the purpose for which it was given, God gives the members of his body certain gifts, with which to share and spread his love and grace to others. As Paul says in Romans 12, if your gift is to preach, then preach; if it is in showing hospitality, then be hospitable; if your gift is prophecy, then prophesy; if God has given you wisdom, then share it with the community. Jesus told a number of stories about servants or stewards who did not faithfully use the 'gifts' or 'talents' that their master entrusted to them (Matt 25:14-30, Lk 19:11-27).



LIVE purposefully

The grace God has given you through his Son Jesus Christ is a priceless and unlimited gift. It is unlike the wealth of the world which is finite, which we have learned to hoard away for ourselves as insurance against a 'rainy day'. In fact the reality of God's grace is that he has given it to us for the exact opposite reason, to faithfully distribute it to all his people and even to those who are not yet part of his family. Faithful administration of the generosity of God is a daily challenge, made even harder when we find ourselves struggling with difficult life situations which may lead us to be short tempered, irritable, or ungracious. When we encounter these situations, we simply need to revisit the bottomless well of God's grace to us and let him administer his love and mercy to us so that we might be equipped and prepared to administer his grace faithfully to others.

11. What is one area of your life which you might try to administer God's grace more faithfully this week?

12. What is one way you will try to remind yourself of the riches of the grace God has already give you through Christ this week?



PRAY intentionally

- Praise God for his abundant gifts and blessings to us.
- Pray for the church around the world, that we would always act generously towards others regardless of their circumstance and that this generosity would lead them to encounter the love and grace of Jesus.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to refocus your heart's desires and to help you recognize and appreciate all that God has done for you.
- Pray for an increase of generosity around the world, especially towards the misplaced, the homeless and the refugees.



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], may the grace of God to you, flow generously through you.. Amen.