

A GENEROUS GOD, A GENEROUS PEOPLE

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Scripture: Psalm 116

Psalm 116

¹ I love the Lord, because He hears
My voice *and* my supplications.

² Because He has inclined His ear to me,
Therefore I shall call *upon Him* as long as I live.

Then vs. 12-14

¹² What shall I render to the Lord
For all His benefits toward me?

¹³ I shall lift up the cup of salvation
And call upon the name of the Lord.

¹⁴ I shall pay my vows to the Lord,
Oh *may it be* in the presence of all His people.

The verse that I'd really like us to focus on this morning is v. 12. It says: "*What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me?*" What shall I give back to God for all that He has given to me? And one of the songs that has always ministered to me is a song sung by Travis Green that asks the question: "What shall I render unto Jehovah for He has done so many things for me?" That is a beautiful song that brings home this central point that God's goodness is always kind of in our face.

What does that evoke from us?

What must it evoke from us for God's generosity to us? During World War II, there was a humble watchmaker in Holland, and his name was Caspar Ten Boom. He opened his home up for Jewish families who were fleeing from the Nazis.

His daughter, Corrie, later wrote about those terrifying years, because it was terrifying to hide people whom the Nazis were hunting, and they stood in grave danger. But she said that what stood out most was when her father was asked why he risked his life to do something like this. He simply said, "It would be an honor to give my life for God's ancient people." Notice his choice of words; an honor, not an obligation or even a duty. For him, generosity wasn't loss; it was privilege. It was a privilege that he had to give of himself, even to the point of death.

And that generosity reflects the generosity of God for us. That is generosity in action. Not because the Ten Boom family had wealth or power. They didn't. But because they had experienced the generosity of God in their lives. They knew His love, they knew His mercy, and they knew His faithfulness. And the only fitting response to receiving all of that was to give back.

Beloved, God's generosity is not occasional generosity. It's the very foundation of our lives. He gives freely, He gives abundantly, and He gives continually.

1. He gives freely.

When the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they grumbled and feared starvation. They had no fields to plough, no bread to bake. But every morning, without fail, there was manna on the ground, bread from heaven. They did not earn it, they did not buy it, they did not even ask rightly for it. Still, God gave it freely to them.

Centuries later, Paul would write, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this, not your own doing. It is the gift of God." Ephesians 2:8. Salvation itself has been freely given to us by God.

Hudson Taylor, missionary, pioneer to China, lived with that same conviction. He trusted God alone to provide the salaries for all his staff. One day he realized that there was no money to pay any of those who were working. He just spent that night praying and asking the Lord for provision. And a letter arrived in the mail with the exact amount that he needed to pay all the salaries that month. Hudson Taylor later wrote, "God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supply," because God gives freely to us.

Amy Carmichael saw this as well when she was here in India rescuing children. Often, she had to feed many, many people, clothe many people, but she asked no one but God. She turned to Him at the end of the day and said: "Lord, these are my needs for tomorrow." And she says that every now and then, there would be parcels that came to her. She called them her miracle parcels because they came at the exact time with the exact needs being met by God's wonderful hand of provision. God became the father of the fatherless, to all of these children.

2. God gives abundantly.

Jesus once stood before 5,000 hungry people, and everyone wondered what they should do. Even when that question was posed to the disciples, they looked perplexed and said, "Come on, Jesus. 5,000 people?" and yet, there was one boy with five loaves and two fish. And He gave in such abundance that there were 12 basket of food left over after they had eaten. That's abundance.

Paul puts it like this. He says, "My God will supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." My God will supply all your needs abundantly, not according to our needs, not according to our limits, but according to His riches.

R.G. LeTourneau, a Christian industrialist, decided to reverse the tithe. He gave away 90% of his income to God and kept 10% of it for himself. And people asked how he could do that. He answered, "It's not how much of my money I give to God, but how much of God's money I keep for myself." And God kept providing for him in even greater abundance.

3. God gives continually.

God doesn't stop giving. Jeremiah said, "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. they are new every morning." Every sunrise is proof that God is still giving.

Jesus told the story of the prodigal son who squandered everything. When he returned, his father ran to him, embraced him, clothed him, put a ring on his fingers, sandals on his feet. And the father had every right to say, "Enough, enough." But love never runs out, does it? The father's generosity was continuous – a vision, a metaphor to God's goodness in our lives.

Mother Teresa used to do that day after day, giving of herself, generously washing wounds, giving dignity to people who were dying on the streets of Kolkata. She once said, "We can do no great things, only small things with great love." That's continual generosity, love renewed every morning.

What does God's generosity look like for us?

But when we think about God and the way He gives freely and abundantly and continually, let's look and see what that looks like for us.

From the widow's oil: remember the widow turning to Elisha and saying, "I have nothing except this oil." And he said, "Bring the pots and pans that you have." And she got her pots and pans, and those that belonged to her friends, and the oil kept flowing and flowing freely.

Hudson Taylor, Amy Carmichael, Mother Teresa – the story is the same. Our God is a generous, generous giver.

What shall we give to Him?

If this is God's pattern of giving, how can we mirror it in our own lives? What would it look like to give freely, to give abundantly, to give continually?

1. How do we give freely?

To give freely is to give without strings attached, without hesitation, without waiting to see if it benefits us.

Mary of Bethany gave freely when she poured perfume worth a year's wages at Jesus' feet. She didn't hold back. She simply loved and she gave extravagantly to Jesus. And for us, giving freely may look like releasing our time to God in prayer, giving more of our time to God in prayer.

Dr. Joseph John said, "Try and give more of your time on Fridays." And I would really encourage that. so many of you trust us with your prayer needs. And one of the things I've seen is that 15 minutes is not enough. If you've prayed, you know that 15 minutes is not sufficient to go through so many needs. But along with it, it comes with the trust of our brothers and sisters who are saying: I trust you with my need. And so we can give extravagantly in terms of prayer, serving without expecting any thanks, offering forgiveness as well to someone who can never repay it.

Let me give you an example of giving of our time to God in prayer. Susanna Wesley, mother of John and Charles, actually had 19 children, but I think only 10 or 12 of them survived. Her life chaos, if you can imagine her looking after all those children. But in the midst of all of that, she carved out time for prayer. You know how she did that? In the midst of the day, she would just sit in her chair outside, and she would take her apron and put it over her face. And her children knew that that was her moment of connecting with God. They didn't disturb her during that time. She chose to carve out time for prayer. And maybe that's something that we need to do as well, that we can look at our days. We are all very busy, and we will never be able to pray for 15- or 30-minute slots if we are not intentional about it. We've got to be intentional about prayer.

Take forgiveness. Corrie Ten Boom once spoke in Germany on God's forgiveness. A former guard from Ravensbrück came forward, extended his hand and asked her to forgive him. Corrie says she froze because she recognized the guy and whispered, "Jesus, help me." Then she stretched out her hand. She said God's love came flooding through her, enabling her to forgive freely. But again, it took intentionality on her part. She first had to stretch out that hand for God to flow through her. Later she wrote, "It is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world's healing hinges, but on God's goodness." Jesus said, "Freely you have received; freely also give."

2. How to give abundantly?

To give abundantly means not giving the least we can, but pouring out more than seems reasonable the way God does with us. Paul commended the Macedonian believers. He said in 2 Corinthians 8, in

the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. It's hard to think of poverty and generosity going together. But that's what came with the Macedonian church. He says, "For I testify that they gave as much as they were able and even beyond their ability." That's abundant giving, beloved, not measured by how much they had, but by how open their hearts were.

- And here's where we can connect if we look at tithes and offerings. Paul says, "Each one must give as he or she has decided in their hearts, not reluctantly or under compulsion. For God loves a cheerful giver." Why cheerful? Because everything we have comes from God. He is the one who gives to us. my job, my income, my opportunities, my breath. And when I give back in tithes and offerings, I'm not parting with my money. I'm returning a portion that He has entrusted to me.

And here's the promise. Whoever sows sparingly, will also reap sparingly. And whoever sows generously, will also reap generously. God is nobody's debtor. When we give freely and abundantly, He blesses in provision, in peace and opportunities, and in fruit.

- But abundant giving doesn't stop with just money. It can be seen in many other ways – abundantly with our talents and our skills. Every gift given to us is really a trust from God. "To each one has been given a spiritual gift," 1 Peter 4. Bach used to sign his music "Soli Deo Gloria", to the glory of God alone.
- Abundantly with our time, not leftovers but giving Him prime time – mentoring, visiting, serving like Epaphroditus who nearly died for the work of Christ, we read in Philemon 2:30.
- Then abundantly with our love and hospitality. Romans 12:13 says "Practice hospitality". Lydia, newly baptized, opened her house to everyone, we read in Acts 16:15.
- Abundantly in worship. Mary of Bethany poured perfume worth a year's wages at Jesus' feet. Lavish love, extravagant worship.
- Abundantly in service to Him. Paul said he toils and struggles with all God's energy. True service often costs us something. We give abundantly of ourselves.
- Abundantly in forgiveness. It's always hard. Forget giving abundantly; to give even a little in forgiveness might be difficult because the hurt is so real. But Jesus said abundantly. Seventy times seven. Do it till you can't count anymore, Peter. That is generosity of heart for us.

Abundant giving looks like this. Yes, I give my tithe, my offering. But I don't stop there. I give my talents, I give my time, I give love and hospitality, I give worship, I give in service, I give in forgiveness, and I give with a cheerful heart without holding back, knowing that God multiplies whatever I place in His hands.

3. How do I give continuously?

To give continuously is not just once in a burst of emotion, but to make generosity the rhythm of our lives. Paul said, "Pray without ceasing." In the same way, our giving of ourselves and all the things that we give to the Lord can be without ceasing. We need to make it a habit, not an event in our lives. It may look like daily prayer, daily surrender of ourselves, regular generosity that's woven into our budgets, daily encouragement given to people around us, worship woven into everyday life.

Brother Lawrence wrote a wonderful little book. He used to wash pots and pans and he said, "For me, that was worship." And forgiveness – offer forgiveness.

Think of generosity towards God in this way – as a heartbeat. Just as our heart beats without stopping, so generosity should pulse through our lives constantly. As breathing – as naturally as we breathe in and out, we need to breathe in grace and breathe out generosity. And as a musical rhythm, even generosity should become the rhythm line for our lives, keeping us in tune with God.

In closing:

So our closing challenge this morning is to ask ourselves:

- What can I give freely to God? Perhaps my love, my forgiveness, my worship.
- What can I give abundantly? Perhaps my resources, my time, my energy in serving Him.
- What can I give continuously? Perhaps my prayers, my daily surrender, and my ongoing acts of kindness.

Beloved, generosity is not just measured in rupees or in possessions. It is measured in how closely we mirror God's generosity to us. What shall I render unto Jehovah, for He has done so many things for me?

Heavenly Father, help us, Lord, to answer that question completely in line with Your goodness to us, that You would help us to give freely and abundantly and continually. In Your name, Lord Jesus, we pray. Amen.