



ENOUGH

“Thankfulness and Generosity”

(Biblical Text: 2 Corinthians 9:6-15)

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Thanksgiving Day will come this week. For most of us, I suspect, it will be a mild-mannered holiday full of football, feasting, and family reunions, where we stop at least for a hurried mealtime prayer that expresses our thanks for all our blessings.

It will be that way at our house. Ann and I will do extra duty in the kitchen. But truth is she’s been getting ready for weeks. She will be up way early, long before me. She’ll bake pies and get the turkey in the oven. My part comes later, making the gravy, carving the turkey, and getting the TV channels selected for football.

Sometime before noon, long after potatoes need peeling, our family from south of the city will arrive! Our grandkids, Coyd and Cyla, have also been looking forward to Thanksgiving Day for weeks – and they each have their favorites. It’s the lure of mashed potatoes and gravy for Coyd, and it’s the promise of Pumpkin Pie for Cyla. And when the fun is over and they all go home, Ann will collapse with exhaustion! *(And rest up for the KU vs. K-State game on Friday!)*

The original Thanksgiving holiday wasn’t all laughs and giggles either. The pilgrims endured far more difficult things than most of us will – persecution because of their faith, the devastation of an early winter, but they found a way to assemble a meal from whatever meager provisions were available, and give thanks to God.

They remembered the words of Scripture, ***“In all things give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”***¹ Notice what the Word says – in **all** things! But it isn’t always easy. We know that we ought to always be thankful. But real thanksgiving isn’t something that we can turn on, like a water spigot.

In his book, *A Rumour of Angels*, Peter Berger says we need God to help us escape cynicism and despair and experience once again the feelings of wonder and true thanksgiving for the gift of life. I think he’s right.

In this series, we’ve been looking at Adam Hamilton’s little book, *Enough*. The fourth chapter bears this title, *“Defined by Generosity.”* It’s my favorite chapter. I want to tell you why. In it, he suggests that one day, at the end of each our lives, people will sit around and discuss the qualities by which we will be remembered. *“One of the defining characteristics I hope (we) will be remembered for is generosity. My hope is that people would say of us, “He (or she) was defined by generosity.”*²

¹ | Thessalonians 5:18, paraphrased.

² Adam Hamilton, *Enough: (Revised and Updated)* Discovering Joy through Simplicity and Generosity, Copyright © 2012.

A large part of my ministry for the last several weeks has been with families doing the very thing Adam identified. Most recently with the family of Dr. Jerald Burton, whose service is this afternoon. Of the many things that will be shared about his influential life, one will surely be this, *“He was defined by generosity.”*

I can think of no higher aspiration. But that’s not how many of us live our lives. We tend to define our lives by what we receive rather than by what we give. We are grateful for generosity – as long as we are on the receiving end. It starts early.

When our youngest son was still young enough to order happy meals at McDonalds, he was eating lunch there with his first girlfriend, Nikki, and her mother Ferol. Ferol reported to us that when John was long since finished with his chicken nuggets and Nikki was just starting on hers, he solemnly intoned, *“Nikki, God likes it when we share!”* Never think they aren’t listening in Church.

Like little children, we often get the message backwards. We are thankful for our blessings but rarely stop to be thankful for the joy of giving itself! My deepest prayer for all of us is that we would learn the truth of Winston Churchill's famous words: *“We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.”*

In our text from II Corinthians 9:6-15, we find six important principles to help us.

1) Verse 6: “The Law of Reciprocity” *“The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.”*³

Linda Sisney came up to me a few weeks ago after my first message in this “Enough” series, and showed me this verse: *“Some give freely, and still grow all the richer; others withhold what is due, and only suffer want.”* - Proverbs 11:24. Generosity unlocks the secret to a life of plenty. Some have put it this way: *“You can’t out-give God.”* I’ve lived and given long enough to tell you it’s true.

2) Verse 7: “Give Cheerfully” *“Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”*⁴

Cheerful comes from is the Greek word *hilaros*, from which we derive our English word *“hilarious.”* Here it doesn’t mean funny but exceedingly glad. When we tithe, we honor God with a large enough portion of what God has given to us, that it makes our hearts glad. I’ve never known someone who tithed who wasn’t a happy giver. I’ve known lots of stingy, grumpy people who give far less.

3) Verses 8 and 10: “Don’t Skimp on the Seed” Verse eight says: *“God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.”*⁵ Look on to verse ten...

³ II Corinthians 9:6, Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Copyright © 1989. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

⁴ Ibid. II Corinthians 9:7, Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version.

⁵ Ibid. II Corinthians 9:8, Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version.

“He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.”⁶

In our generosity, we need to learn a lesson every good farmer knows – if you go skimpy on the seed, you’ll have a lesser harvest. When we are tempted to hoard, or go light in what we give, we place a limitation on God’s blessings. When we give generously of ourselves, God increases our storehouse of seed.

4) Verses 11-12: “Generosity is True Thanksgiving”

“You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God.”⁷

Giving, not receiving, is the basis for true Thanksgiving. But that’s not how we usually calculate it. On Thanksgiving, we will pray some version of this prayer: *“For all we have received, may the Lord make us truly thankful.”* How would it change us if we prayed for what we have been able to give? *“For all the love we have given away, for the money we gave to feed the hungry, O Lord, we are truly thankful.”*

5) Verse 13: “There is a Test” *“Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the Gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing...”⁸*

I don’t really have to explain that one do I? Ultimately we are all accountable for our following Jesus and how faithfully and obediently we live our lives.

6) Verse 14 and 15: “It’s all about Grace” *“...because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!”⁹*

We learn live a life of generosity from God, who moved heaven and earth to give his Son for us. When we think of that grace, we can’t help but give generously.

In every Church I have ever served, there was someone who truly defined generosity. I learned from watching their example. At Monticello, it was [Dena Rae \(Glenn\) McLaughlin](#). At Coffeyville, [Art \(Pauline\) Hann](#), who would always call me just before the end of the year and ask, *“How much do we still need?”* At Aldersgate, [Cliff and Anita Larson](#). In Dodge City, it was [Mike \(Marsha\) Morrison](#), who was the first to give to every need. In Wichita it was [Tom \(Carol\) Fox](#). At Old Mission, I really don’t yet know who all will emerge as champions of generosity, but among them will be one young man who stopped me after the service to tell me he learned to practice tithing from his grandfather. **Thanks Gramps!**

What defines you? How will you be remembered? My prayer is that long after Thanksgiving Day, they will say of you, *“He (she) was defined by his (her) generosity.”*

⁶ Ibid. II Corinthians 9:10, Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version.

⁷ Ibid. II Corinthians 9:11-12, Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version.

⁸ Ibid. II Corinthians 9:13, Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version.

⁹ Ibid. II Corinthians 9:14-15, Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version.