

Generosity and the Heart of God

Indulge me for a moment while I dote on my child. Imagine the scene in our kitchen as we started assembling a Christmas hamper for a community programme at church. The sight of mummy wrapping up a big cardboard box grabbed our son's attention: on the off-chance that this box was for him, he wanted to get involved. My husband and I explained that not everyone in our city has enough of what they need at Christmas, and that this was a very small way for us to help. So, we started to fill the box with tins of soup, bars of soap, breakfast cereal and all the other sensible things I had bought for the occasion. Our 4 year old son didn't think this was good enough. He headed straight to the drawer where his (sugar-averse) parents had stashed all of the sweets he'd been given at parties and birthdays – the drawer from which he is occasionally allowed to pick one treat – and emptied all of them into the hamper.

All of them.

This box was no longer going to be good for anyone's teeth, but it was good for my heart. It was good to see my little boy moved to lavish and heartfelt generosity when confronted with a need. He didn't know who would get our hamper, but he knew that they didn't have enough. He wanted to give of his own precious bounty to make their Christmas happy.

In the hectic run-up to Christmas in a household with small children and a husband in full-time ministry, why has this short moment stuck with me? Because, I think, it points me right to the heart of God. Our God is a generous God: not a sensible, give-them-what-they-need kind of God, but a God whose heart overflows with kindness, richness, and a desire to bless. When God gives, He gives the best. And it is so good —so refreshing, liberating, and challenging—for us to remember that.

Generous in creation

We see God's generosity in his creation of the heavens and the earth [\[1\]](#), in the dazzling variety of valleys and mountains, beaches and oceans, deserts, jungles, and glaciers. That's before we even consider the shapes and sizes of all the different creatures who live in them. Did you know there are more than 100 species of octopuses in our oceans? 10,000 species of birds flying in our skies? 25,000 species of orchid growing on the earth? Did you know that just one handful of sand has 10,000 grains in it – and would it boggle your mind to know that there are more stars in the cosmos than grains of sand on every beach in the world?

It's the same with our food. The earth in all its richness provides us with a multitude of colours, textures, flavours, and smells to delight our eyes and our tastebuds.

We see a world absolutely dripping in variety, beauty, splendour, and majesty, because the One who made it was generous. He didn't cut corners, cut costs, or do it on a budget. His world is

lavish and abundant. Paul tells us in 1 Timothy that God 'richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.' [2] His purpose in generosity is to bless us.

Generous in salvation

We see generosity in the ministry of Jesus during his time on earth. When Jesus changed water into wine, he didn't make just about enough, and it didn't taste just about ok. It the finest wine of the whole celebration – at the end of the ceremony when a lot of the guests wouldn't have noticed anyway. When he fed the 5000, he didn't ration the food: there were basket-loads of leftovers after everyone had eaten and been satisfied.

And don't we see generosity most of all—most beautifully, most fully—in the story of salvation? It's not just the ministry of Jesus on earth which gives us an insight into his generous nature. It's not just his death on the cross, either, when he breathed his last and gave himself up for us, taking our punishment for sin and enabling us to go free. Before he gave up his life on earth, he had already given up his life in heaven, in order that he, 'though he was rich, yet for your sake... became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.' [3] Of course, Jesus didn't act alone in this great act of salvation: we see the generosity of our Father in giving his one and only son [4]; we see the generosity of the Holy Spirit in being given 'without limit.' [5] And we see the generosity of God in what salvation means for us: not a get-out-of-jail-free card, but the warm, loving, eternal embrace of a Father, who unites us with his Son, gives us his Spirit now as a guarantee of our inheritance, and one day will welcome us home to be with him in glory everlasting. In salvation, God gives us himself. In salvation, God holds nothing back.

Generous in response

When we think about the generosity of God, I think we have a pattern to follow. We have a pattern to overflow with generosity; we have a pattern to give even when it's at personal cost. I love to read about the Macedonian church in 2 Corinthians: Paul tells us that 'in the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity... They gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability.' [6] The key for them, of course, was that they 'gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to [others].' [7] When we give ourselves first of all to our generous God, our churches, too, can be marked by rich generosity to others – a generosity which might come as rather a shock to the world around us (as I suspect it did back in Paul's day). Generosity in ministry and mission are key values for Union, too: we want to equip church leaders to love God, grow in Christ, serve the church, and bless the world. We want to invest in leaders who—amongst many other things—will show the generous heart of God to the world.

I know that I have a pattern to follow, too, in my own heart, in my own diary, in my own wallet, in my own home. When I reflect upon the kindness of our Father in giving us all things, and upon the richness of my salvation through Jesus, who at that very first Christmas made himself poor that I might become rich, my heart becomes a little more like my son's. I remember that everything I have was given to me; I remember that I can trust him to provide what he wants me to have. I remember that in giving away what is precious to me—whether that's my sweets, my time, my money, or anything else the Lord has given to me—I become a little bit more like my Saviour. When I reflect upon the generosity of God, I start to know the freedom of a generous heart.

Endnotes

[1] Nehemiah 9:6

[2] 1 Timothy 6:17

[3] 2 Corinthians 8:9

[4] John 3:16

[5] John 3:34

[6] 2 Corinthians 8:2-3

[7] 2 Corinthians 8:5



Sarah Bennington

Sarah Bennington works for Union in Development and Communications. She lives in Cambridge with her husband, Matt, and two young children. They all love being part of the church family at Christ Church, Cambridge, where her husband works full time.

Discipleship, Generosity, Giving