

Generous Congregations, Generous People

Outline

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Second Corinthians 8:1–15 (*The Message*, excerpts)

A misconception about Christian generosity: the only requirement for generosity is a changed heart.

- Surely we need more people with generous hearts, but we already have more people with generous hearts than we have people who are able to practice generosity as they would like.
- And we certainly need more churches with generous spirits, but we already have more churches with generous spirits than we have churches that can practice generosity as they would like.

How can we move from generous hearts to generous hands?

Pay attention to circumstances conducive to generosity.

People and Churches in Circumstances of Scarcity

- People: poor, unemployed, over-extended on debt or lifestyle, etc.
 - Often the most generous with what they have
 - No matter what their spirit, their generosity is limited by circumstances.
 - Implications:
 - Churches need a financial ministry to help people survive and move out of their circumstances of scarcity.
 - No matter one's circumstances, people need a PLAN.
 - Churches need a public mission ministry to address some of the external circumstances that make life hard for people.
- Churches: churches that have declined dramatically over the years, serve poor people, sometimes new churches, some immigrant churches
 - Implication:
 - Need a PLAN to move out of circumstances of scarcity

People and Churches in Circumstances of Sustainability

- People: when income is sufficient to provide for basic necessities plus some funds for contingencies and future goals
 - Implications:
 - Churches need to understand that people cannot bypass this stage.
 - You cannot devalue people's concerns regarding their struggles and goals for educating their children and having funds for retirement.
 - You need a financial ministry appropriate for people at this stage.

- Churches: when effective ministry is supported by sufficient recurring and predictable sources of income
 - Implications:
 - Cannot bypass this stage or devalue its importance
 - Want to do more than they can
 - Live with a tug at their hearts
 - Mission sustainability is the issue

Becoming People and Churches in Circumstances of Generosity

- John Wesley did not start his pilgrimage to generosity by giving all he had.
- He provided for his necessities and then, as his income increased, he continued a relatively simple life style and gave the rest away.
 - “[By] first supplying thy own reasonable wants, together with those of the family; then restoring the remainder to me, through the poor, whom I had appointed to receive it.”
- “If those who ‘gain all they can’ and ‘save all they can’ will likewise ‘give all they can’”

Gain

- As important as the careful assessment of expenses is to moving from scarcity and sustainability, the ultimate source for the generosity you seek is on the income side.
- Must believe that God has a future for your life and your church
- This is not a “prosperity gospel.” Indeed, Wesley was careful to warn against making money in ways that hurt others or ourselves.

Save

- By “saving” Wesley meant “to avoid unnecessary spending.”
- Prosperity can be far more of a spiritual challenge than poverty.
- We can easily become the Greedy Farmer (Luke 12:13-21) or the Greedy Church.

Give

- John Wesley told his sister, “Money never stays with me. It would burn me if it did. I throw it out of my hands as soon as possible, lest it should find its way into my heart.”
- And Wesley told everyone that, if at his death he had more than ten pounds in his possession, people had the privilege of calling him a robber.

We are both the Macedonians and Corinthians!

There are no generous churches without generous people.
And those generous people are most likely to be found in generous churches.

Now to the One who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine . . . Ephesians 3:20