

## Generosity 5 – Generous to our brothers and sisters (2 Cor 8:1-5, Acts 4:32-37, Matt 25:34-40)

Harvest season is a lovely season of the church's year – we celebrate beauty of creation, and abundance of God's provision for us. Also a time to be generous: [SM Macmillan last Thurs and Make Lunch this Sat, Foodbank Harvest Sunday](#) / [AS Macmillan this Fri, Foodbank and Make Lunch Harvest Sunday](#). Hopefully there'll be lots raised for all of these good causes.

*I wonder what your favourite charitable causes are?* Perhaps emergency relief/food aid, perhaps medical charities, for many it's things they have a connection to – whether that's a cancer charity Willen Hospice or perhaps a charity which a friend or family member works for.

It's all good – but how do you decide? When the charity muggers approach you on the high street, or you see a heart-wrenching ad, or a friend asks for sponsorship, how do we make decisions? There are so many needs!

This month and next we're looking at the whole theme of generosity in its widest sense – we've looked at our lifestyle, our speech, as well as financial generosity. And as I've shared in a piecemeal way thus far, the best advice I can give as regards financial generosity is fourfold – four Ps:

- **Pray** about it – involve God and let him stir your heart
- **Plan** your giving – decide most of what you give in advance
- **Pursue relationships** – in the end, the Christian life is all about that – form connections with the things you give to – most of our giving is to local church, friends in mission or charities we have a particular love for
- **Promptings** – i.e. despite all the above, be ready to be spontaneous as well – most approaches for sponsorship are a surprise, or you may pass a charity collector in the street and it touches your heart. Don't plan 100%! **Great book – 10 second rule – EXPAND** – applies to giving as well as acts of kindness.

But particular theme today is **generous to our brothers and sisters – teaching of NT is that we are generous to all, but especially to fellow Christians.** Not to deny humanity and value of all people, but we should prioritise Christians, for two reasons – one spiritual, one practical: (1) we have shared values – we tend to give most generously where there's a deep connection – as said before it's all about relationships;

(2) who else is going to do it? Sometimes that's obvious: for example, who else is going to support the ministry of the local church apart from its members? (no state help or grant from CofE) – gift day coming up, and increased challenges as we have some significant repairs to carry out in 2019.

Sometimes less obvious, but even more urgent – in many contexts, Christians will not get help from the state or other organisations, they are systematically discriminated against. So unless other Christians help them, they will be in dire need.

**This is very true today** – if you support an organisation like Open Doors or Barnabas Fund you'll get frequent updates to that effect. Just in the last few weeks I've had requests about Christians in Syria, Pakistan and Myanmar, but it could have been any one of 40 or 50 countries where there is real need.

**But nothing new – goes right back to NT times.** Church has always practised special generosity to its own – see Acts 4 passage and Barnabas – EXPAND (more next week).

And the needs grew – within a generation of Jesus' death and resurrection many Jewish Christians in heartland of Southern Israel were both in danger and also in need. The situation Paul talks about in our first passage (written c. late 50s AD) describes a collection among all the churches to support destitute Christians in and around Jerusalem.

Most challenging thing is that it's the poorest churches which are the most generous – READ v2. Still true today even here in UK. Church of England research – although Southern dioceses are wealthiest, once we factor in income, we learn that, for example, Christians in diocese of Sheffield (with all poor areas of S Yorks) give, on average, a higher proportion of their income than Christians in our own leafy diocese of Oxford. That should challenge all of us.

Jesus summarised along similar lines in famous passage here in Matthew 25. EXPAND. In this case, not just talking about financial generosity, but there's a phrase here that is often missed – v40 'these brothers and sisters of mine' – this is primarily referring to God's people, our fellow believers. St Paul summarises elsewhere in the same way: (1 Timothy) 'Do good to all people, especially those who belong to the family of believers.'

*So as we continue this season of sharing and generosity, let's reflect on this question – alongside all the great causes we support, are we being generous to our brothers and sisters? Is there a particular charity we can connect with which serves fellow Christians in need? Are we living out that guideline, doing good to all, but especially our brothers and sisters?*

Not my job to answer that for you today – pray, plan, pursue relationships! – but my prayer is that in this season God will touch our hearts to live out this life of abundant generosity wherever He calls us. Amen.