

Generosity is a very attractive quality and its opposite, miserliness, has become synonymous with a very deep ugliness such as in Dickenson's character scrooge. Even though we all know this from experience as well as intuition, we still seem to find it difficult to take on generosity as a character trait. How can this be? It seems futile to think that simply arguing for something of which we are already convinced would have much effect, so how do we tackle this problem? Rather than looking to information to solve this problem, faith resulting in action seems necessary. Over the next week we will work on a few exercises to increase our confidence in God's word on generosity.

Day 1

Examine

2 Corinthians 13:5-10 is a passage that encourages us to examine ourselves to see if we have faith in Christ. The goal is to find out what our trust and confidence really has at its foundation? To find out what our trust is in, we should ask ourselves the following questions and really look intently into the answers: What causes us to be anxious? When we feel anxiety, what seems to be the root? What are we worrying about and obsessing over? Maybe anxiety isn't our bag, so we could also ask ourselves what causes stress and anger in our lives? What causes rifts in our relationships? Are there any recurring themes? What are our besetting sins? These are generally things that we value highly and often give us some sort of validation or relief from stress and anxiety. In short, besetting sins are evidence of areas where we have created idols. Are there things in our lives we can't give up? Addictions or habits? What would embarrass us the most if others found out? This is a huge hint of what we trust in. What would we be most devastated to lose? Think of things beside the material. Could it be respect, esteem or love? What would we save from our house if it was on fire? Do the answers to any of these things point to a trust in something that is greater than our trust in Christ? If so, we have made an idol out of something finite and one of the effects will be a loss of generosity in this area. We will have a hard time being generous with things whose value is higher than it should because we will fear not being able to have enough. Let's spend some time examining our lives this week and praying that God will reveal any areas where we might be valuing things too highly and lacking generosity.

Day 2

Let Go

In Exodus 13:3-10 the Israelites are commanded to celebrate the feast of unleavened bread. The Israelites were to search their houses and get rid of all leaven, then for seven days they were to eat unleavened bread. This feast was to celebrate God saving them from slavery in Egypt and guiding them to the promised land. Many theologians and bible scholars have equated leaven with sin in this feast, but the reality seems to be a little more complicated because if leaven imaged sin the Israelites would be called to give it up forever, not for seven days. Instead, it may be more useful to see leaven as something like development or culture. The problem was for Israel they had built up a society with certain values being out of alignment with the character of God. These things might not be sinful in themselves, but if given the wrong value will become sinful. What Israel needs to do as they leave the slavery of Egypt is to leave the culture of slavery behind and create a new culture. In the same way, if we are to have a new life in Christ where he is the object of our faith creating freedom in us to be generous, we must leave behind the old behaviors and habits of our previously idolatrous lives. We must create new habits that reflect our new trust in Christ that brings freedom from the slavery of trusting in false gods. In order to do this, we must, for a time, focus on tackling our misguided trust head on. Let us use today to develop a plan to deal with any misplaced trust or worship that yesterday

revealed to us. What concrete actions can we take to get rid of our dependence and slavery to things that are undeserving of our faith? How can we be more generous with the things we overvalue? Can we give anything away to those who are less fortunate? Can we spend time or other resources that we have overvalued helping others? What is our plan to place our trust where it belongs?

Day 3

Celebrate

Let's read Leviticus 23 today. Leviticus is a book that is notoriously difficult to read because it deals with all the laws and requirements God had for Israel. Most people see it as boring. When it comes to the laws regarding how Israel is to worship God, God commands Israel to feast. Leviticus 23 outlines the celebrations Israel was to have and surprisingly the number comes to 57! Some of these feasts lasted for a full week and opposed to this there was only one day of fasting on the day of Atonement. Let's spend some time today meditating on the feasts that God instituted. Why does God call us to so much celebration? Are we good at celebration? What can make us better? What things should we be celebrating more? Will more celebrating help to make us more generous? What is the relationship between celebration and generosity?

Day 4

Loving God

Let's read Psalm 18 today. It's a long Psalm that David writes to praise God for delivering him from the hand of Saul and all of his enemies. It is an interesting Psalm because it contains a surprising fact about our love for God. The first phrase out of David's mouth is that he loves God but the rest of the Psalm revolves around God's salvation of David. As a modern person I would expect that after telling us that he loves God, David would tell of all he has done for God as a sign or proof of that love but instead it is a lengthy list of all God has done for David. The biblical definition of love is somewhat different from our cultural understanding of love. Biblical love is an act of the will to bless another because the other is seen as united or connected to the one who is loving them. The emphasis in Psalm 18 is clearly on God's loving kindness in saving David from his foes, but there are in verses 20-24 references made to David's acts of obedience. This is not the reason for God's salvation but is a response to it. God is connected to David by his covenant and so moves to save David because he loves him. This love or unity on God's part results in a unity on David's part. We love God because he first loved us. We are united to God because He first united himself to us. Loving God is primarily a trusting response to his love for us and because I can put my full faith in the love of God, I can live a life of generous love to others.

Day 5

Loving Others

Let's read Luke 18:18-30 today. This is the famous story of the rich ruler who went away from Jesus sad because Jesus asked him to give away his possessions to the poor. In this passage Jesus is not saying that possessions are evil nor is he giving general advice that everyone must give away all they have. In fact, Jesus does not give this command to anyone else. Jesus gives this command to the rich ruler because he knows this man has made an idol of his wealth and this idol is driving him away from unity with God and unity with other people. Jesus himself is a rich ruler. Jesus has given up his riches to give them to us (Philippians 2:4-11) so that we could be united to God. God is a generous God as manifested in the person of Jesus Christ. If we want to be united to him, we must love him and others in a generous

way. Anything else separates us from the greatest person in all existence and gives us something finite in exchange for the infinite. Let's meditate on how we could love each other generously today.