

## A Generous Heart - 17<sup>th</sup> Jan 2021 – by Carolyn Carter

**2 Cor 9:6 – 11 (NIV)** - Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written:

“They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever.”

Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

### (The Message Version)

God can pour on the blessings in astonishing ways so that you're ready for anything and everything, more than just ready to do what needs to be done. As one psalmist puts it, He throws caution to the winds, giving to the needy in reckless abandon. His right-living, right-giving ways never run out, never wear out. This most generous God who gives seed to the farmer that becomes bread for your meals is more than extravagant with you. He gives you something you can then give away, which grows into full-formed lives, robust in God, wealthy in every way, so that you can be generous in every way, producing great praise to God.

We might feel like we are not growing much at this time, or that it's hard to feel connected to God. Some of the ways we grow in God are well known, listening to His Word, spending time with Him in worship and prayer – but another thing God uses to grow faith us is giving! The Bible teaches that one of the ways we grow is to sow!

In a time like this it's natural to withdraw/retreat a little bit – and that's RIGHT in lots of ways at the moment with all that's going on! But I also feel that God is calling us to a greater level of generosity at this time.... right in the middle of this season where we feel like we've got a LOT of needs ourselves and a LOT of uncertainty about the future.

In a time that feels so unstable, giving to others might seem hard or even risky - but I believe God is after our FULL trust so that He can get us ready to give us something more!

That word READY stood out to me in The Message version of the reading. Sometimes we have to do the opposite of what we are feeling so we can GROW in Faith - God is always calling us up higher, into His ways - because He knows that it means blessing for us! Abraham was called in Genesis to BE blessed and to BE a blessing.

Generosity opens hearts – our own and those around us – people discover and experience the heart of God **mainly** through us! We're called to demonstrate his love and goodness on the earth. Being generous is to be like our Father.

It's NOT just our money we can give, but our time, attention, writing a card, sending flowers, serving others in some way. All of it done in love matters. In Matt 10:42 Jesus says **And if anyone gives even**

**a cup of cold water to one of these little ones - I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward**

God is interested in rewarding us! But He calls us to give without expecting anything in return – like the amazing carers in the NHS are everyday – and as Jesus did in giving His life on the cross to redeem a world that would largely reject Him.

Giving (in whatever way) costs us – that’s why it can be seen as also part of our worship -

We get to give to God AS we give to others - worshipping Him involves our whole lives.

As we give we recognise that everything comes from Him anyway!

We GROW as we GIVE – it’s good for us – good for our hearts – it reminds us that we are depending on Him not on our own resources. God is always interested in what’s going on in our hearts. He says in Matt 6.21 “where your treasure is there your heart will be also”...It’s not money that’s the root of evil but the **love** of money as Paul writes in 1 Tim 6:10.

God says he gives seed to the sower – that means we need to be a sower - then He gives us more seed to sow again. It’s impossible to out-give God! He’s even designed our bodies to replenish themselves – like when you give blood it replaces itself.

God wants us to **increase**, he doesn’t just ADD back to us whatever we’ve given - but he multiplies!

The feeding of the 5,000 MEN (as women and children weren’t counted!) shows this!

Do you think there WAS more food in that huge crowd? The interesting thing is that it was given by someone who didn’t count – a small boy. God always uses people discounted by others. We may think WE don’t count and that what we have to give is not significant and so we don’t offer what we have to Jesus – maybe that’s what lots of others thought in the crowd that day? But over and over again Jesus shows otherwise. He took that little and turned it into a LOT – with 12 basketfuls of leftovers – much MORE than was needed!

Jesus also highlights the widow who gave a few coins over all those who gave out of their wealth. When we choose to give to God (or others) even when we don’t feel like it or feel like it’s worth anything - He SEES - God notices us!!

Jesus also thanked the Father for this very small amount that the boy had offered and I think that is also key – He thanked God for what looked like NOT enough - it’s so important to be thankful even for the small things we have – and God will bless it!

It was ALSO when the disciples handed it out that it grew miraculously. As they gave in faith, not knowing how it was going to turn out! He wants to work WITH us to be the solution to the needs around us!

In the miraculous catch of fish in Luke 5 - 2 boats were full - that’s a picture of why God wants to bless us – this is a physical image of what Jesus says in Luke 6 -

‘Good measure, pressed together and running over’ is how God gives back to us!!

It’s NOT just for us - There are empty boats around us that can also be full of the blessing God is going to pour into our lives. Anytime God gives us something or blesses us this week – let’s make a habit to give something away to the next person we think of!

Sometimes His voice sounds a bit like our own thoughts – except better – so often He is prompting us and giving us ideas of how to reach out to people with His love!

In this time it's so easy to have our focus on the darkness around us, the disciples were about to give up, they'd spent all night fishing and not caught anything. They were focussed on what they didn't have! But because Jesus said so - they went out again. Let's keep our focus on Jesus and on the reality of heavenly things and respond to His voice and leading, not to the world's loud voice - just as He kept His focus on what the Father was doing.

I believe God is using this hidden time to get his church ready, so let's prepare our hearts now and start moving (in whatever ways we can) to share his love with those around us - so that when the time comes that we are able to go out again we've developed good habits and grown strong in Faith and are able and quick to respond to God when things open up. It's what you do in the waiting and often the small things, that matter such a lot! Jesus said the Kingdom of God is like a seed, it starts small, in obscurity, often hidden but it bursts into life and grows to be the biggest tree that all the birds of the air come and rest in. If we give from hearts full of God's love then even if we can give just a little - God can make it count for a LOT! But let's engage our hearts in whenever we give - let's not just leave it to our direct debits but take it to God and ask Him who we should give to and sow in worship and trust that He will give us more seed.

Let's give cheerfully as the Bible says we're to do - that word is the Greek word 'hilaros' - where we get our word hilarious from - so let's give joyfully - because we know we have such a Good and Generous Father who loves to provide for us! Amen!