

THE JOY OF GENEROSITY

By Stephen Williams

We live in a world where it can be easier to find comfort in the magnitude of our savings account than in the magnitude of our Savior's heart for us. Our mindset is warped and broken. The reality of sin in our world means that we are born believing that we will only have a fulfilling life if it is primarily lived for ourselves.

However, as followers of Jesus, he invites us to live our lives differently than the watching world around us. In God's economy, joy is not found in the greed of hoarding our possessions but in the generosity of giving them away.

This is outlined clearly in Proverbs 11:24-25, which says, "One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want. Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered."

How can I grow richer when I give my money or materials away freely? How can I expect to have the time and energy I need to grow to be more like Jesus if the majority of what I am doing is giving of my time to others? These are the questions I have often and still often find myself asking when I feel the Holy Spirit prompting me to give freely of some of my most coveted resources: money, time, and energy.

When you view generosity and the implications of this passage in the context of Jesus' life and ministry, I believe we begin to see the full picture. In Matthew 16:24-26, Jesus tells us that as His disciples we will have to deny ourselves and take up our cross. He says that only when we lose our life for His sake will we find it.

Clearly, Jesus is not describing our ideal life full of comfort and self-indulgence. What Jesus is inviting us into as His Church is something far beyond what the world could ever provide. Jesus is offering us a new perspective on life. This perspective is one where our lives lived to their fullest are ones that are not lived ourselves, but for others. It is one where a pouring out of ourselves for others and, most importantly, for Christ will give us a new life and joy unimaginable.

Understanding this context allows me to reexamine those questions about giving freely because the way of Jesus redefines the word "wealth." Where culture points to money and material wealth as a major key to freedom, Jesus claims that the giving of your money and material wealth will set you free from the grips of greed and selfishness. And, as we always eventually see to be true, He is right. The more we give of our time, money, and other resources, the more we remember that they were never ours to cling so closely to in the first place.

Finally, and most importantly, when we as God's people faithfully step into joyful generosity, God is glorified. Jesus tells us that this is where true life is found. This is where our joy comes from. The joy of knowing that by giving of ourselves (and our things) we are living as Christ did. We are testifying to the world around us that there is a better way, and His name is Jesus.