

GENEROSITY

**IT'S NOT ABOUT MONEY BUT
ATTITUDE**

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INTRODUCTION

In today's individualistic world, the concept of generosity as an essential part of our response to Jesus, has been lost. Salvation is considered an individual undertaking having no bearing on the way we relate to the people around us. Even evangelism and social action are often a legalistic response to the Great Commission and the parable of the sheep and goats (Matt 25:31ff) rather than an outflow of a deep generous urge within us. However, this is not what the Bible teaches.

Both the Old and New Testaments have much teaching on love and generosity, especially within the kingdom of God. The Old Testament Laws are essentially a commentary on how the people of God were to show love to others and to God. Jesus said as much in Matthew 22:37-40.

Jesus replied: "‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."
(Matthew 22:37-40)

This is re-iterated by Paul in Romans 13:8. The laws are thus all about loving God and loving people. They ensured

that the Israelites did not oppress others the way they had been oppressed in Egypt, but were instead generous and helped the poor get back on their feet.

Similarly, in the New Testament Jesus taught that his followers would be known by their love for one another.

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. (John 13:34-35)

We see the practical outworking of this in the early church in Jerusalem. Acts 4:34 says that there was no needy person in the church because the wealthy gave money to the church to distribute to those in need.

The aim of this publication is to enable us to rediscover the Biblical teaching on Generosity in the life of a Christian.

GENEROSITY AND THE GOSPEL

Generosity is an essential part of the gospel. Though one can be generous without being a Christian, it is impossible to be a Christian and not be generous. This is why, in the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:31-46, the ungenerous are condemned to eternal punishment. Their lack of generosity is seen as evidence of their not being Christian.

*Then he will say to those on his left,
'Depart from me, you who are cursed,
into the eternal fire prepared for the
devil and his angels. For I was hungry
and you gave me nothing to eat, I was
thirsty and you gave me nothing to
drink, I was a stranger and you did not
invite me in, I needed clothes and you
did not clothe me, I was sick and in
prison and you did not look after me.'
(Matthew 25:41-43)*

In the following sections, we will look at three aspects of the gospel and how they relate to generosity.

THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR

*The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because
he has anointed me to proclaim good*

*news to the **poor**. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the **prisoners** and recovery of sight for the **blind**, to set the **oppressed** free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (Luke 4:18-19)*

These are the words that Jesus used to describe his ministry at its outset. Did Jesus mean the spiritually poor, blind and oppressed or was he talking about actual physical poverty, captivity, blindness and oppression? Our tendency today is to spiritualise this. We see Jesus as the solution to our spiritual problems, come to save us from sin. We don't give much importance to the physical problems that people face. But the gospel narratives show that Jesus addressed both.

In the subsequent sections of chapters 4 and 5 Luke shows how this proclamation by Jesus was fulfilled in His ministry. We see Jesus casting out spirits (Luke 4:31-37), healing (Luke 4:38-41), preaching (Luke 4:42-44), healing a leper (Luke 5:12-16), healing and forgiving a paralytic (Luke 5:17-26) and teaching (Luke 5:33-39). Apparently, Luke understood the statement made in the synagogue at Nazareth as including both the spiritual and the physical.

The physical aspect of Jesus' ministry is also highlighted in His response to the disciples of John the Baptist in Matthew 11:4-6 when John sent them to confirm that Jesus was indeed the Messiah.

Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me." (Matt 11:4-6)

All the examples cited here were cases of physical healing, except for the poor who had the gospel preached to them. Obviously, given the context, John's disciples were able to see that the gospel was a physical solution to the needs of the poor. The question then arises of how this can be. This happens in three ways. The gospel results in

1. Dropping of wasteful habits from the lives of the poor
2. God's blessing on them giving them success in what they touch
3. The transformation of the hearts of the rich so that they are willing to share their wealth with the poor in the kingdom.

While the first two are important, by themselves they are inadequate to free those who are shackled by structures of poverty and without the resources to help themselves. For such people the third method is critical. We see this effect of the gospel in Acts 4:34f where it says,

And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. (Acts 4:33b-35)

In the kingdom of God the poor should experience not only physical deliverance from poverty, but also from injustice, rejection and dehumanisation. The mark of genuine biblical evangelism is that it takes place as an expression of true concern for individuals and communities who are not seen as "souls" to be saved but as persons who have physical, material, psychological and spiritual needs and who are the object of God's love in Jesus Christ (C. René Padilla).

THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

*From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the **kingdom of heaven has come near.**" (Matthew 4:17)*

Another essential part of the gospel proclaimed by Jesus is the kingdom of God. Today's preaching focuses more on the teachings of Paul, who wrote a commentary on the gospel of Jesus which was meant to explain some portions

which were not clear – like the doctrine of justification etc. It was not meant to replace the gospel, but to clarify it. It is a good exercise to try and write out the essence of the gospel from Mathew, Mark, Luke and John without referring to the epistles of Paul. What you would find is that Jesus preached an invitation into the kingdom (Matthew 4:17) rather than just an invitation into heaven (John 3:16)! These go hand in hand and we cannot ignore one and preach the other.

It was the kingdom, or the community of the people of God, which was the good news that Jesus proclaimed. People were invited to come and become a part of this community. Since the gospel is an invitation to the kingdom, and the church is the physical manifestation of the kingdom, there is no gospel without the church. We saw in the previous section how the early church practised this community living by sharing their resources so that no one was in need. Such community needs to be a reality in our churches as well.

*By this everyone will know that you are
my disciples, if you love one another.
(John 13:35)*

*If anyone has material possessions and
sees a brother or sister in need but has
no pity on them, how can the love of
God be in that person? (1 John 3:17)*

Our witness is not our words but the love and fellowship within the community of the kingdom. If this love is not manifested, the witness dies. If there is a family going to bed hungry in the church, the gospel does not exist in that church.

Another important feature of the kingdom community is that all are equal within the community no matter what their position in society.

So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:26-28)

How real is this in our churches? I remember a dacoit who had become a watchman after conversion, living close to my house in Kolkata. He would not go to church since he felt that he was not treated with dignity there. He was seen as 'poor'. The Railway officers in the Railway colony where I lived, would not go to the Railway church, since they would have to rub shoulders with the staff. They preferred to go to the bigger and richer churches away from their home. Where is the acceptance that Jesus showed to the people who came to him?

Without love and generosity there can be no kingdom community. Generosity is not just a sharing of financial resources and wealth, but an acceptance of people and magnanimity in our evaluation and estimation of people. The giving of dignity and value is often more important than the giving of money.

THE GOSPEL OF REPENTANCE

*In those days John the Baptist came,
preaching in the wilderness of Judea
and saying, “**Repent**, for the kingdom of
heaven has come near.” (Matthew 3:1-
2)*

John the Baptist was the first to announce the imminent arrival of the kingdom of God that was brought by Jesus. He called on people to repent because the kingdom of heaven was at hand. After John’s arrest, Jesus carried on this message.

What does “*repent*” mean? We often take it to mean turning away from sin, but if that was all that John had in mind, he would have had little reason to rebuke the Pharisees who prided themselves on keeping the law and being sinless (Matt 3:7).

The Greek word for repent is *metanoia* - a combination of ‘*meta*’ meaning change and ‘*noia*’ meaning mind. It means

a change of one's mind. He was calling for a change in a person's attitude towards God that affected their actions and life choices.¹ Thus the evidence of their repentance would be that the wealthy would share with those who did not have enough, and those in power would cease oppressing and extorting those under them (Luke 3:10-14). That is, they were to turn from a lifestyle of self-seeking pursuit of wealth to a lifestyle of generous sharing of wealth.

What is the repentance that will bring about such a lifestyle change? Jesus said,

No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. (Matthew 6:24)

The repentance is from money or material things. What does it mean to serve wealth? It means to trust and depend on wealth, and to see it as the provider for your needs. So, Jesus is saying that you either see God as your provider or you see wealth as your provider. You cannot hold to both beliefs.

¹ Michael J. Wilkins, "Matthew" ESV Global Study Bible ed. J. I. Packer et al. (Wheaton, Illinois : Crossway, 2012)

This is illustrated in Jesus' dealing with two persons, the woman caught in adultery in John 8:1-11 and the rich young ruler in Matthew 19:16-22. In the former Jesus does not seem to take her sin as a major problem, and tells her, not to worry, but to not repeat the act. But to the rich young ruler He is far more severe and says that he needs to sell his possessions, give it to the poor and then follow Jesus. In today's church the rich young ruler would be feted and the woman sent empty away. But in Jesus' kingdom, she was filled and the rich young ruler sent away.

Essentially Jesus was saying that one could not enter the kingdom of God while loving money and trusting it for their day to day lives. So the repentance called for is a repentance from trust in money and material things. Jesus calls us to a repentance in our faith, and not in our works. The repentance from sin (or works) comes automatically after the repentance in our faith. Repentance in our faith leads to salvation, and repentance from sin to sanctification. Both are essential, but faith precedes works.

NECESSITY OF GENEROSITY

We saw in the parable of the sheep and the goats that the basis of judgement there was generosity. Those who were generous had salvation, while those who were not generous did not have salvation. Does this mean a gospel of works? No! It means that if a person has turned from trust in the world to trust in Jesus, they would naturally be

generous. If one is not generous, then repentance has not taken place and salvation is not there.

The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!
(Matthew 6:22-23)

What does it mean to have an eye that is unhealthy? The same Greek expression is used in Matthew 20:15 in the parable of the labourers in the vineyard, where it is translated as envious.

Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?'
(Matthew 20:15)

An “unhealthy eye” means to be stingy or ungenerous. Rather than rejoicing at the good fortune of the other labourers, these were jealous and angry about it. Similarly, the word for “healthy” is in other places translated as generous. So Jesus was saying that if we are generous our lives will be full of light, but if we are stingy and ungenerous our lives will be full of darkness.

Hence generosity is an essential aspect of our Christian life.

SUMMARY

The three aspects of the gospel that indicate generosity as a necessary response on the part of a Christian are

- Jesus' proclamation of the gospel as the answer to the needs of the poor
- The gospel as an invitation to the kingdom community rather than a ticket to heaven
- The call to turn away from trust in the world to trust in God so that we share wealth rather than accumulate it

GENEROSITY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

There is a lot of teaching in the Old Testament on the need for generosity among the people of God. Much of this teaching is not well-known, since most Christians today read only the New Testament and have little knowledge of the Old Testament apart from the Ten Commandments and the prophecies of the Messiah.

The Israelites were slaves in the land of Egypt for 4 generations where they were cruelly oppressed. When God delivered them from their slavery, He repeatedly asked them to remember their experience as slaves in Egypt (Dt 5:15, 15:15, 24:18, 22) and therefore not to oppress other people as they had been oppressed. Rules were made to ensure that oppression of the poor would not be practiced in Israel.

LAW OF JUBILEE

One of the main rules pertaining to this was the law that land (the means of production) could not be sold permanently and had to return to the original owning family every year of the Jubilee (Lev 25:13-17). Verse 17 reads as follows:-

In this Year of Jubilee everyone is to return to their own property.... Do not take advantage of each other, but fear

*your God. I am the Lord your God. (Lev
25:13,17)*

By this it was ensured that no family lost the means of production permanently and was thereby reduced to slavery or poverty forever.

Today, the means of production is education and many governments have recognized and made laws to ensure that all have access to education. However, the education scenario is still warped, with the rich often getting a better education than the poor. How have we as a church addressed these needs, firstly within the church community and secondly outside? Have we ensured that no one in the church loses out on higher education because of finances?

The church was a leader in the field of education once upon a time, with the intention that all should have access to the Bible. Today we have lost that edge, and have often lost sight of the social justice that education brought. We need to get back into this sector and see how we can make it more equitable for the poor.

LAW OF GLEANING

For those who either did not have land or the means of production, provision was made in the law of gleaning. By this law, when the rich harvested their crops they were to leave some behind for the poor to collect for their use.

*When you reap the harvest of your land,
do not reap to the very edges of your
field or gather the gleanings of your
harvest. Leave them for the poor and
for the foreigner residing among you. I
am the Lord your God. (Leviticus 23:22)*

This recognized the responsibility of the rich to see that the poor were fed and did not go hungry. Are we responding to this responsibility?

One of the biggest hindrances to generosity is the tendency to evaluate the worth of the recipient of our generosity. While this is often necessary, and we need to address the real needs rather than the felt needs, the law of gleaning did not lay down any qualifications for the recipients. The person did not need to be an Israelite and did not have to prove his or her worth in any way. The only criteria was being poor and not having food.

We sometimes judge those who are poor and unemployed as being lazy or unwilling to work or not trying hard enough. But their inability to work may arise from psychological or other causes that are not immediately visible. We need to remind ourselves that we have not been through their experiences and should not judge their worthiness of our generosity. That they are poor and in need should be enough.

THE SABBATICAL YEAR

*At the end of every seven years you
must cancel debts. (Deuteronomy 15:1)*

In the law of loans, it was said that loans were to be given to the poor who were Israelites without any interest (Lev 25:35-38). Further, if they were unable to pay back the loan, in the seventh year (or Sabbath year) the loan was waived off (Dt. 15:1-6). This ensured that no one remained permanently in debt, nor did his debt increase due to interest rates. We can understand the value and benefit of these laws when we look at the bonded labour situation in India. However, the question for us is, are we available to make loans to those in need and are we willing to write off debts of those who cannot pay back the loans?

In addition to writing off debts, those who had become slaves as a result of debt were to be set free in the Sabbath year. Not only were they to be set free, they were also to be given capital to rebuild their lives (Dt 15:12-18). So, the rich were not just to provide for the poor, but also help them get out of dependency into a position where they could look after themselves.

How does this translate into action today? We do not have slaves (at least as Christians), but we do have the poor who work for us. When they leave our service due to various reasons like marriage or health issues, do we see that they

are set up to look after themselves? Or will the changed situation in their lives lead to more poverty? There are myriad combinations of circumstances to which this principle could be applied. If we are aware that God has placed a responsibility on us we would make a proper Christian response. But if we are unaware of the Biblical teaching, a proper response usually does not happen.

LAW OF THE KINSMAN REDEEMER

*If one of your fellow Israelites becomes
poor and sells some of their property,
their nearest relative is to come and
redeem what they have sold. (Leviticus
25:25)*

There was a further clause in Moses' laws that if a person had to sell his possessions because of a dire need, his next of kin was to redeem his possessions and give it to him. That was the responsibility of the rich towards their poor relatives.

SUMMARY

Generosity is the core of the Old Testament Law and this is often missed by Christians today. This same error or omission was often an issue in the nation of Israel as well and the prophets in the Old Testament had to continuously raise their voices on behalf of the poor. Passages like Isaiah

58, Jeremiah 22 and the book of Amos should be read by all in the church to recognize God's concern for the oppressed.

As we saw in the previous chapter, the gospel is the formation of the kingdom of God or the community of God's people. Within this community, the commands of the Old Testament need to be enhanced as Jesus did in the Sermon on the Mount and the poor looked after as in Acts 4 and 6. Unfortunately this responsibility to the poor is often neglected. This trend needs to be reversed.

INDIVIDUAL GENEROSITY

So, how does this work. How does this translate in my day to day life?

THE POOR WE MEET

We are in continuous contact with the poor in our daily lives. They serve us at home as maids, in the market as sales help etc. Too often these people are lost in the larger picture of the poor, and we feel helpless in tackling poverty because of the enormity of the problem. However, without losing sight of the big picture, we need to take our eyes off it for a moment and look at the people around us and see how we can make their lives different.

As Christians, the plight of the poor in our milieu should be somewhat mitigated because of our intervention. These are the people God has brought to us. At the same time, we need to keep an eye on the big picture to get a right perspective of the intervention required. Sometimes we must go beyond the felt needs to the real needs of people. Often the real needs are individual in context, but sometimes it is structural. So, poverty could be because of an individual's inability to get a job, or it could be because of a lack of adequate jobs in a place. Both need to be addressed but will require different action steps.

The usual occasions which lead poor families into debt is illness and marriage. It is in these events in their life where our helping hand needs to be extended to see that they do not end up in debt.

Educating them in the use of resources and on how to be debt free is something we should attempt for their good.

GIVING OF OUR TIME

The biggest constraint in offering a helping hand is often not money but time. To be able to create time for being available to people is the subject of time management, but there are some attitudes we need to look at closely.

The first is that my time is mine to use for my own good. This is not true. Our time belongs to God and must be used for His purposes. Obviously, as the Sabbath command teaches, adequate use of time for rest is essential. But what time is available is not for my pleasure but God's kingdom. That change in mindset will make a considerable amount of time, which we keep for our own relaxation and leisure, available for the kingdom.

The second is the tendency to procrastinate. I have always followed the policy of seeing that what can be done today is done today and not postponed to tomorrow, even if it is not required to be completed today. That way the next day more time is available to give to people and their service.

There are many proverbs in the Bible against the spirit of procrastination and as believers we need to see that we do not fall into this trap.

The last attitude we need to look at is to consider whether we are willing to strain ourselves to make time to be available to others. Most people use only free time in the day to give to others. But if we really want to be a blessing to people we will have to sacrifice some of the things we like to do so that we can be there for people in need.

HOSPITALITY – THE SACRIFICE OF PRIVACY

Opening our homes to meet the needs of people is an area of ministry few are willing to take up. Somehow, we feel that our home is the last bastion of privacy which we would not like to lose. Ministry outside the home is acceptable, but to let people come into the house becomes a stretch we are unwilling to make.

But our homes have been given to us by God to use for His kingdom and not to keep it selfishly for ourselves. In fact, hospitality is one of the commands that is repeatedly emphasized in the New Testament – Rom 12:13, I Pet 4:9, Heb 13:2.

Hospitality is not providing food and lodging for the occasional visitor but keeping a home that people feel comfortable in. Keeping this kind of open house makes it a

refuge for people who are hurting and need a kind ear to share with.

Interestingly I have found that homes that are kept spick and span do not make visitors comfortable. A home that looks lived in (not a pig sty) makes for comfort and helps people come out with their concerns.

In today's fast paced world this is an aspect of Christian life and ministry which is slowly disappearing and needs to be rediscovered by making the sacrifices required for the same.

FORGIVING THOSE WHO HURT US

This is an area where the Indian church seems to struggle a lot. We just do not seem to be able to forgive each other our offences, real or imagined. This is serious as Jesus said in Matthew 6:14 that if we do not forgive then God will not forgive us. The same is emphasized in the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18:21-35).

Jesus clearly links the inability to forgive with the lack of salvation. Why then do Indian Christians find it so hard to forgive? Is it that they do not have salvation?

That is a question each individual Christian will have to answer for themselves, but I would say that it is because they do not have a clear understanding of faith and forgiveness.

Faith is seen as a means of salvation from sin and not as a means of life. So, we do not live by faith, but by the norms of this world. When we do this, things in this world become very important and valuable and so when someone threatens us in this area we are angry and unforgiving. But when we live by faith, in all aspects of our life, and not just for salvation, these material issues become less important and we can forgive easily (or at least more easily).

Forgiveness is often seen as a legal jugglery and not a rebuilding of a relationship. The advocate, Jesus, deals with God and that is it. I remain as I am except that I am no longer under condemnation. That is not the forgiveness the Bible teaches. The Bible speaks about building a relationship with God based on His forgiveness. When I have that relationship, the things of this world grow dim and whatever people do to me here do not matter, and I can forgive.

It is because of this that Jesus says that if we do not forgive others then we do not have that relationship with God, and so are still lost.

We need to realize that we are seeking forgiveness of sins so that we can have a relationship with God and not just to escape hell. Heaven is that relationship with God and not just a material utopia.

ACCEPTING PEOPLE WHO ARE DIFFERENT

The human personality comes in a myriad of shades, created by vast differences in experiences and perceptions. We tend to mingle with those personalities that complement ours and make us comfortable and we avoid people who we find disturbing. This is natural.

But as Christians we are to live in the supernatural realm where we fellowship with all in the church however different they may be from us. This is especially true when dealing with believers from other denominations and cultures.

One side of generosity is our willingness to overlook things which we find offensive, but forms a part of another culture or class of people. We may not agree with their practices, but can we value them as Christians and extend our hand of fellowship? Romans 14 deals with this issue in the church.

I sometimes see elders being unable to extend a hand of fellowship to their own children because of generational differences. Is there then a hope for them to accept other denominations, cultures and peoples?

Our individual ministry as believers is to give hospitality and friendship for which this aspect of generosity is important. It is easy to be financially generous from a

distance, but it is not easy to let people become emotionally close to you as that is emotionally expensive and difficult. We are not meant to stay aloof and help without getting involved. We need to build relationships and help through these relationships. This also enables us to witness to the people we are helping which we otherwise cannot do as acceptance is the first step in witnessing.

What is the quality of your relationship with people of a different class that you interact with daily? Are you too subservient to those above you or too condescending to those below? Do you know their hopes, sorrows, concerns? Or is your relationship purely business? Can we change ourselves so that we have friends across cultures, classes and generations?

Xenophobia or the inability to accept other cultures has become the norm in churches around the world, and churches are often divided by ethnic groups. Some of these are because of language, which is understandable, but many are because of ethnicity. So in the US you have Afro-American churches and Anglo Saxon churches and Indian churches all worshiping in English and belonging to the same denomination. While this may be just for cultural comfort, this was not the ideal which Paul was working towards. He envisioned a church where there would be no

dividing wall between cultures, but all would accept each other.

GENEROSITY IN RELATIONSHIPS

Man was created for relationships. It says in Genesis 1:28 that man was made in the image of God. It further elaborates to say that mankind was created male and female or as a duality. God has a relationship of love within the Trinity and man is also to have this kind of relationship with his fellow beings, especially his wife. This is the image of God we need to have within us.

Right relationships come from a generous eye, where we are willing to look past offences, forgive one another and seek the benefit of others. However, this does not happen because of our fallen nature, and unless we recognize these hindrances to proper relationships, we will never get it right and the Kingdom of God will not become a reality.

James 4:1-4 says that unless we set right our relationship with material things, we will not have a right relationship with people. This is because we see others as competitors for scarce resources. Only when we live by trust in Jesus rather than trust in the things of this world, do we see others as people who we can help, rather than as competitors. So, repentance from the world is a necessity for right relationships with people.

Peter in his epistle asks us to have humility in our relationships. If we do not have humility, or a right understanding of self, we are unable to accept others and

have right relationships with them. This right understanding of self comes when we accept Jesus, and having the approval of God do not require the approval of others. Without Jesus, we are consumed by our own sense of sin and guilt, and so find it difficult to accept others.

Jesus says in Matthew 11:28-30,

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

When we come to Jesus, He accepts us and we can sense His presence with us. Jesus accepts us as we are. When we know that God has accepted us, we do not need to have acceptance from man. We are freed from the desperate search for approval. We can then have a normal and healthy relationship with other people.

What is important in this passage is that we should go to Christ. Jesus says that we must take His yoke upon ourselves. This essentially means that we can no longer do what we want, but must walk in the path that Jesus has laid out for us. This is what baptism is all about, when we die in Christ in baptism we then live with the yoke of Christ on us doing only what Christ asks us to do.

Walking with Jesus, we learn from Him and grow in knowledge and understanding. One of the things we learn is that we have been created by God exactly as He wants us to be and so we do not have to try and be like someone else. As Anand Pillai puts it, "God has made you a first-class original, do not become a second-rate copy." We can be proud of being an original of God not looking for approval from man but seeking to fulfil the purposes of God in our lives. This understanding of the purpose of God in our lives makes life meaningful and helps us to understand our importance in the economy of God.

However, we cannot experience these blessings if we do not forgive ourselves for our past failures and sins. It is only when we put our past behind us and accept ourselves as we are that we can experience the great deliverance God wants to give us from feelings of inferiority.

Many people have accepted the salvation of Jesus but have not forgiven themselves. Some are so caught up with others that they try to become someone else. We need to realize that God has made us exactly as he wants us to be, to fulfil the purpose for which he has created us. We need to be ourselves and not someone else. It is this understanding of ourselves that sets us free to accept ourselves as we are and in accepting ourselves we can accept others.

The promise of Jesus then proves to be so real, that His yoke is easy and light. Life becomes a joyous freedom.

GENEROSITY CHALLENGE

At the close of his ministry, Jesus said concerning His disciples

As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.” (John 17:18)

Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. (John 20:21)

Whenever anything is repeated it increases its importance and emphasis. So, Jesus is here emphasising the fact that we have been sent like him. The fact that this applies even to us now is seen from John 17:20,

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message.

It is important to recognise the fact that each of us have been sent like Jesus and are representatives of Jesus today.

Matthew 11:28 is a popular verse which we use to call people to Jesus. So, when we meet people in need we tend to tell them to go to Jesus. But if we have been sent like Jesus, we need to modify it as follows - “Come to **me**, all you who are weary and burdened, and **the Christ who dwells in me** will give you rest.”

That would make a radical difference in our lives as we find that we have to share the time, money and whatever resources God has given into our care. God expects us to be generous because we are believers, and because we have been sent like Him. This is the love which fulfils the law in our lives.

How does this work in practice? To the best of our ability we try and see that lowly workers are well paid. We pay them more than our neighbours do, since we have a concern for their poverty. In times of crisis we make ourselves available to them, to help them find solutions which are out of reach to them. While we do not promote dependency, we do provide assistance in emergencies.

We are the representatives of Jesus in the world. Just as Jesus reached out and healed people from their inferiorities, we also need to reach out to people. Are you willing to accept people when you do not like their behaviour? My wife accepted me even though I was drinking and smoking and that helped me understand the acceptance of Christ in my life. Jesus accepted the woman caught in adultery (improper relationships) and His acceptance healed her. Do you accept people?

Our calling is to reach out to people and bring healing to them. Our calling is to bring out the beauty of Jesus in people. Can we continue to encourage and build each other up in the kingdom?

There will be bad experiences. People whom you are generous with will let you down. I once helped a family financially with an agreement that they would return the money in monthly instalments. After a few instalments the repayments stopped. After a period of time, they became wealthy with a standard of living well above ours but still did not return the money. There always had some reason for delaying further. We are still good friends but the money is never mentioned or returned.

Such bad experiences tend to make us ungenerous, and are from the devil to turn us away from the nature that God wants us to have. Whatever others may do, we need to go on being generous. May God bless you as you walk this path of generosity. May God make you a great blessing to many.