

## Paraklēsis: Generosity

Generosity is a word that literally means “of noble birth” from the Latin “generōsus.” Yes, this also has the same root as most of our English “gen” words, like genesis, generate, gender, genital, genus, genius... etc. Historically, the word was used to identify a person’s background or lineage – a generous person, by definition, came from a well-known, respected, powerful, and wealthy family. The label really had nothing to do with the person’s charity or compassion as it does today. In fact, **stingy, generous people were likely commonplace.** It was in the late 1600’s when “nobility” was starting to be associated with the spiritual makeup of a person in addition to their physical lineage. So, noble behavior, and thus generosity, started to be something that was virtuous.

“But wait” I hear you saying, “the Bible is full of scriptures that encourage us to be generous.” Yes, and the Hebrew words translated as generous generally mean “noble.”

*No longer will the fool be called noble, Or the rogue be spoken of as generous. (Isaiah 32:5)*

This scripture is interesting because the word for “noble” here (nadiyb) means “liberal” or “generous” and the word for “generous” here (showa’) means “noble” or “free.” Wow, what an interesting, and maybe confusing rabbit trail to follow and get lost on. And I have not even mentioned the Greek! I will let you continue that if you want. **My intention here is not a word study...**

The concept, however, of generosity is well established as a godly principle. In Acts 20, Paul claims that Jesus Himself said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Please try to leave any political associations behind and consider the links between the words “noble,” “liberal,” and “generous.” Put these words into phrases and the similarity of their meanings are illustrated. Commit noble acts. Apply liberally. Generous amounts...

I recently listened to a talk given by Nick Hanauer, an entrepreneur and billionaire who made a lot of money investing in Amazon in the early days. **He is unashamed of his wealth**, and he lives the life of a typical billionaire with multiple mansions, yachts and private planes. But he has an interesting viewpoint on his wealth that may shed some light for us on God’s idea of wealth, abundance, and generosity. He explained that, very generally, in this world, the wealthier an individual is, the less of a percentage of their wealth they give away. This seems counter intuitive in that a wealthy person has more than enough for what is needed and the excess could be given away without much burden. But, this is rarely done in real life. His argument is that **if rich people were more generous with their money, they would ultimately gain more wealth.** He did give one striking example that I will share with you. If restaurant owners paid their workers enough so that they could afford to eat at restaurants, wouldn’t that benefit the restaurant industry? He is claiming that if rich people were more generous, the poor would be better off and that would make the rich richer... I think this may touch on what is **God’s ideal for our physical world** – If we all follow His instructions in this life, the world would be great. Treat others how you want to be treated. **I envision this ideal as “an upward spiral.”**

*“Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either. Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back. Treat others the same way you want them to treat you.”  
(Luke 6:29-31)*

In Ecclesiastes 11, Solomon tells us to “cast our bread on the waters and it will return to us.” You can read this like a promise that applies to all mankind. In fact, I think this is where the world’s concept of karma comes from. Like Nick Hanauer, the billionaire, suggesting that generosity will serve to make you richer, we

will only **benefit more if we simply give what we have**. This idea is so completely anti-intuitive, seemingly counterproductive to me. But it is truth. It is Truth substantiated by our Messiah, himself:

At the end of Luke 7, a generous woman dumps a whole jar of expensive ointment on the Messiah. I read one source that said the value of the nard in the jar was on the order of one year's wages. I cannot imagine having that kind of generosity to spend a year's salary on one gesture of reverence and love. If this gesture was her act of casting her bread on the water, it certainly came back to her - in the form of forgiveness of her sins. But we all get that, just for asking, right? **She also received the praise of God** and became an example to us all for the rest of time. What's that worth?

But let's not forget, generous giving has nothing to do with getting anything in return. **It is a gesture of love.**

On the other end of the spectrum (in terms of worldly value) an example of great generosity comes to us in Mark 12 and Luke 31. That is the story of the widow generously donating all that she had to live on. Again, what was her reward for this act of selflessness? Do we need assurance that we will be compensated for our donations? Should our donations be affected by what incentive we have or what reward we'll get? Should we give with the hope of receiving? Or, should we give to compensate for what we have already received? I think neither. **We give because we love.**

*We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. (1 John 3:16)*

I know a common thought that comes to mind when considering whether or not to give generously is our concern for how the gift will be used. For me, that question commonly sounds like, "if I give this beggar money, will he spend it on cigarettes and alcohol, or worse?" And that thought often prevents me from giving. It is logical, after all. We want our gift to provide the most benefit that it can, right? But, didn't the folks at Simon's house get chastised for criticizing the woman for "wasting" a year's wages by pouring ointment on Christ? **God wants us to give with abandon.** On that impending judgment day, can you imagine God saying to you, "Why did you give that money to the drunk guy on the street? You should have known that money would be wasted on booze!" – Or maybe this question from our Creator is more plausible, "Why did you withhold that money to the beggar on the street?" A very wise and respected man I knew often told folks who would criticize his generosity for these reasons, "**I would rather be labeled gullible than stingy.**" Wise words from a non-believer – especially if that label we are given is coming from our Judge!

*"The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.' (Matthew 25:40)*

I think that if we, the people who claim God's promise of salvation through His Son, (a.k.a. "Christians") **practice extreme generosity and give with reckless abandon** to any and all who had need, then the rest of the world would see with their eyes, and even experience firsthand the fruit of our works and thus the true love of God. This would be an amazingly effective tool to proselytize.

*Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. (Colossians 3:2)*

Peace to you and glory to God!

-Nate

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