



# “The Wisdom of Generosity”

Text: Proverbs 11:24-31

*a sermon by Kevin Fleming*

**June 28, 2020**

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH - EVANSVILLE, INDIANA

There were four young men, students at a church-related college who were renting a house together. One Saturday morning someone knocked on their door. When they opened it, there stood a bedraggled-looking old man. His eyes were marbled, and he had a silvery stub of whiskers on his face. His clothes were ragged & torn. His shoes didn't match. In fact, they were both for the same foot. He carried a wicker basket full of unappealing vegetables that he was trying to sell. The boys felt sorry for him & bought some of the vegetables just to help him out. Then he went on his way.

But from that time on, every Saturday he appeared at their door with his basket of vegetables. As the boys got to know him a little bit better, they began inviting him in to visit a while before continuing on his rounds. They soon discovered that his eyes looked marbled, not because of drugs or alcohol, but because of cataracts. They learned that he lived just down the street in an old shack. They also found out that he could play the harmonica, and that he loved to play hymns, and that he really loved God. Every Saturday they would invite him in. He would play his harmonica and they would sing Christian hymns together.

They became good friends and the boys began trying to figure out ways to help him. They decided to gather together clothes and shoes and the other things that would be of use to their ragged friend. Under cover of darkness, they went to the man's shack and left the boxes outside his door.

On Saturday morning, right in the middle of all their singing, the man suddenly said to them, "God is so good!" And they all agreed, "Yes, God is so good." He went on, "You know why he is so good?" They said, "Why?" He said, "Because yesterday, when I got up and opened my door, there were boxes full of clothes and shoes and coats and gloves. Yes, God is so good!" And the boys smiled at each other and chimed in, "Yes, God is so good." He went on, "You know why He is so good?" They answered, "You already told us why. What more?" He said, "Because I found a family who could use those things, and I gave them all away."

We began, two weeks ago, by saying that wisdom is a kind of "divine common sense" and it gained when one's life is lived in connection with God. Wisdom offers us a different perspective - some might call it a moral core - a enduring sense of right and wrong. When we walk in the way of wisdom, there are blessings that become apparent in our lives. It's not that they weren't there before, its just that we can suddenly see them and appreciate them and the One from whom they come.

This week, we begin looking at some of the behaviors that wisdom brings. The first of them is - for want of a better word - generosity. Generosity is a benevolent, unselfish attitude that finds expression in many ways. Generosity is born of a kind heart and a renewed spirit. Generosity seeks to live that lesson we all learned in kindergarten: that sharing is what we do. Generosity sees, with spirit-opened eyes, the needs of the world around and seeks to offer help and hope.

Those young college men had their eyes opened to the needs of one the world might readily dismiss. But they also had their eyes opened to the heart of generosity when the one they sought to help, in turn used what he had received to help others. That's how generosity often works.

One notion we need to have dispelled is that generosity is exclusively about wealth and money. It's not. Wealth and money can become ways that generosity is expressed, but there are many other means of expression that may be just as valuable.

Have you ever known one of those people who always seem to have time for whatever it is you need? Their door is always open, their phone is always charged and on, their coffee maker is always ready to go. Years back, a book I was reading suggested that "time is the new currency." It is true. We value time more highly than we ever have. To offer someone time is a great and valuable gift.

Have you ever known one of those people who always seems to remember little moments - and the big moments - in life? It's the person who never misses a birthday with a card or a call. It's the person who sends over a plate of cookies or a coffee cake when you are new to the neighborhood. It's the person who does the unexpected kindness that sets you back for just a moment. That's generosity.

One more, just to keep you thinking. Have you ever known one of those people you could call at a moment's notice for some help and you just know that they will offer whatever it is you need? Maybe it's picking kids up at school (remember when we did that?), or getting something you need from the store, or taking care of something around the house? That's generosity. That willingness of spirit, that sense of sharing, that overwhelming gift of care and concern - that is the spirit of generosity.

Now, having lured you into believing that we were not going to talk about money and wealth - let's talk about money and wealth. If that makes you a little nervous, welcome to the world of the gospel. Jesus talked about money and wealth more than he talked about anything else. So, we're on solid ground.

In the collection of the Proverbs, the direct language of wealth is not often used. Professor Walter Bruggemann reminds us that images of fruitfulness are often employed. In our passage for today, imagery is clear: "those who trust in their riches will wither, but the righteous will flourish like green leaves." (Prov. 11:28) And later, "the fruit of righteousness is a tree of life." (Prov. 11:30a) The image is powerful. Those possessed of a spirit of selfishness and greed are like dried up trees, with barren branches and withered leaves. Those who embrace wisdom's way of generosity are like lush, green trees, with supple branches that move with grace in the wind.

When we are stingy and miserly with any of the gifts that fill our lives - but especially our wealth - our lives are not what God intends them to be. When we are more wrapped up in concerns for ourselves than we are in concern for neighbors in need, we are not living as God intends us to live. When we are more interested in how we can get more, rather than sharing out of the abundance we have already received, we are not living as God intends us to live.

Quaker theologian and author, Richard Foster, tells us, "When we let go of money, we are letting go of part of ourselves and part of our security. But this is precisely why it is important to do it. It is one way to obey Jesus' command to deny ourselves.... When we give money, we are releasing a little more of our egocentric selves and a little more of our false security.... Giving frees us to care. It produces an air of expectancy as we anticipate what God will lead us to give. It makes life with God an adventure in the world, and that is worth living for and giving for."<sup>1</sup>

There is great wisdom in generosity. Generosity is the way of God and commended to us by Jesus Christ and, by the Spirit's working, we are empowered to live this life the way of the world does not understand. Generosity is seen in God's gift of the law, the Son, the Spirit, and the church. Generosity is seen in Jesus laying down his very life for those he called "friends."

The wisdom of generosity. May we gain this wisdom and live its blessings.

---

1.) Richard J. Foster, quoted in "Reflections," Christianity Today (6-12-00)



First  
Presbyterian  
Church

609 South East Second Street  
Evansville, IN 47713  
(812) 423-6297  
[www.firstpresevansville.com](http://www.firstpresevansville.com)

First Presbyterian Church  
is a partner congregation with  
the Covenant Network  
of Presbyterians.

