

# GENEROSITY

## F O R U M

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### Gracious Generosity: A beginning of understanding

[Key references influencing my early understanding of Gracious Generosity: “Cash Values” by Craig M Gay; Crown Ministries materials; Kingdom Advisors materials; “Free of Charge” by Miroslav Volf]

#### *God the Giver (The Owner of all giving freely asking for nothing in return)*

- Creator and Sustainer of life
- Saved by God’s generosity (From the manger through the cross to Christ’s return)
- All things come from God (Rom 11:35-36)
- Volf: “to live in sync with who we truly are means to recognize that we are dependent on God for our breath and are graced with many good things. It means to be grateful to the Giver and attentive to the purpose for which the gifts are given.”
- To do so means we are willing to “present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God” Rom 12 This is our ultimate response to God the Giver

#### *Our Response to God the Giver (building a bridge to generosity)*

- Faith (Affirming God the Giver)
  - Acknowledging our dependence on God not my own achievements/gifts/resources
  - Embracing the character of humility (as Christ humbled himself)
  - Luther: to receive from God in faith is the height of human dignity
  - Our faith honors God
  - Volf: “Faith tells us that we do not exist simply to live our three score and ten years without pain, with ease and enjoyment, to accumulate possessions, power, or knowledge, to receive accolades and enlarge our egos. How empty such a life would be! Faith is an expression of the fact that we exist so that the infinite God can dwell in us and work through us for the well-being of the whole creation. If faith denies anything, it denies that we are tiny, self-obsessed specks of matter who are reaching for the stars but remain hopelessly nailed to the earth stuck in our own self-absorption.”

- Gratitude (Appreciation for God's gifts)
  - 2 Cor 9:15 Paul's gratitude and thanksgiving for God's "indefinable gift"
  - When we thank God we honor Him: when I am grateful I recognize and honor God explicitly as the Giver and recognize and affirm myself as a recipient of God's gift (Volf)
  - Personally, sometimes I struggle with gratitude/thankfulness because it admits my dependency, weakness, insufficiency and neediness (rather than humbled I feel humiliated)
  - God's gifts come with this message: "You are loved!"
  - Bottom line, "I am grateful for the wonder of just being there as fruits of God's creativity and object of His blessing."
  
- Availability (being an instrument of God's gifts)
  - God gives so that we may also be givers, helping others exist and flourish
  - We move toward being generous givers not just fortunate receivers
  - Givers live the way God created us to live
  - Living sacrifices (Rom 12:1)
  - We live and act in our world as we see God being and acting.
  - Mystery of God within us, acting through us, not as agent but as instrument
  - Volf: "Today most of us want to be agents, not instruments. We want to act, not to be acted upon, not to be used by another who acts. We are afraid that as instruments we would be reduced to mere means... available for mistreatment. But what does it mean for God to use us?"
  
- Participation (being part of the flow of God's good gifts to his creation)
  - God's gifts are unidirectional outward from Himself
  - At the core, our participation is multidirectional: toward God as we receive/toward neighbors as we pass on what God has given us
  - Luther: "God never works in us without us"
  - The how of our full participation is the result of God's ultimate gift; Christ indwelling us and leading us toward God-like generosity.
  - We can be participants in God's gift giving if we chose to let Christ in and work through us (the act of surrender)
  - Paul: I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Gal 2:19-20)

### ***Crossing over to Gracious Generosity***

- Volf: "When truly loving, the self moves outside of itself to dwell with God and neighbor, and only then is it truly at home. When this happens, we have crossed over from self-centeredness to genuine and fulfilling generosity" (gracious generosity.)
  
- Caution: If we do not turn from facing God (worship methodologies) to face our neighbor, the flow of God's gifts are arrested with us, and we will miss the purpose of the strength and renewal that come through our worship (Volf)
  
- Volf: "Every gift breaks the barrier between the sacred and mundane and floods the mundane with the sacred"

- Consider these:
  - 1 Peter 4: 10-11 (use gifts you receive to serve others)
  - 1 John 3: 16-17 (true love is sharing with those in need)
  - 2 Cor 8: 7 (excel in the grace of giving)
  - 2 Cor 9: 6-8, 11-15 (gifts meeting needs of others while honoring God)

***Questions to consider for discussion:***

- What is your net worth today versus a year ago?
- What is your worth in God's heart compared to a year ago?
- How do your answers influence your acts of generosity? Which plays the dominant role in your considerations?
- Write out a list of what God has given you throughout your life.
- What of these gifts have you made available to others (1Peter 4:10)