

DROP-DEAD GENEROSITY

I. Acts 5:1-16

A. In the initial years of the early church, some pretty wild and amazing things were taking place. Excitement was off the charts. Those of us who may have experienced revival-like times, have only nibbled on comparable crumbs. Each day back then brought renewed expectation of the Holy Spirit's work and joy unspeakable was the norm. The fires lit on Pentecost were raging in glory!

B. One of the incredible manifestations was widespread acts of generosity. This wasn't driven by heavy-handed leaders or twisted doctrine or political activism but was a unique work of the Holy Spirit. Like the signs & wonders that routinely affirmed the preaching of the Gospel, generosity was a hallmark of the early church. Acts 4:32-37 (ESV) says: **32** Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. **33** And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. **34** There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold **35** and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. **36** Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, **37** sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. (This takes us to the doorstep of today's text.)

C. The story I'm about to share is one I've never preached on before. Frankly it's a bit frightening. It seems a more fitting tale for the OT book of Judges. But it takes place smack dab in the middle of the early church's glorious emergence and Luke pens it like a seasoned journalist. If anything, it reveals the God of the OT is the same God of the NT--nothing has changed, save Jesus has died and risen for the sins of us all. And does this event serve to dampen the glory? Not in the least!

D. Acts 5:1-16 (ESV) adds a healthy dose of fear and trembling to the miraculous...

1) **V1-2:** *1* But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, *2* and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. (Perhaps they coveted the prestige of those generous ones like Barnabas doing the same? They may have been genuine believers but their actions were grossly disingenuous.)

2) **V3:** *3* But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? (How'd Peter know about his deceit? Word of knowledge? Another form of revelation? By unnamed witnesses to the fact?)

3) **V4:** *4* While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God." (There was no rule or edict or forced obligation that this couple was under to cause them to act the way they did. Their deceitfulness was a matter of their hearts!)

4) **V5-6:** *5* When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. (He dropped dead!) And great fear came upon all who heard of it. *6* The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him. (He may have received a Christian burial. We don't know that his sin wasn't covered by the blood of Jesus! What words, if any, were spoken over his grave? What would it have been like on that burial detail!)

5) **V7-9:** *7* After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. *8* And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." (For X amount?) And she said, "Yes, for so much." (Yes, for X amount.) *9* But Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." (Note: A wife or husband shouldn't be in allegiance with their spouse when they align themselves against God. Don't become an accomplice or accessory in another's sin! If your loved one goes to rob a bank, don't drive the getaway car!)

6) **V10-11:** *10* Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. (She dropped dead!) When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. *11* And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things. (So did this squash the revival?)

7) **V12-16:** *12* Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. *13* None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. *14* And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, *15* so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. *16* The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed. (The church remained a raging fire and continued growing rapidly!)

E. Here are some truths to ponder:

1) Nothing is hidden from God. You can hide things from your church, your pastor, your family, your neighbors, your coworkers, but not from God. He sees and knows everything! (e.g. Sometimes sermons unknowingly expose matters of heart.)

2) God does not need your money or stuff. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills. "If He had need of anything He wouldn't tell you!" But God will use your generosity to touch the lives of others and you'll be touched in the process.

3) When you give, don't do it for show. Matthew 6:1-4 (ESV) **Jesus' Sermon on the Mount: 1 Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. 2 Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 3 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. Henry Ward Beecher said: "Do not give, as many rich men do, like a hen that lays her eggs...and then cackles."**

4) When you give, do so with a Godly attitude. Don't let your fists be tight nor your arms be twisted. Paul wrote the church in Corinth how to give. 2 Corinthians 9:6-8 (ESV) **6 The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.**

5) Giving is an act of worship. Whether you're giving vertically or horizontally, genuine generosity from the heart, is a God-honoring endeavor that pleases Him. Nobody may see you give to someone in need and yet God sees. Just like nothing is hidden from our Lord in the way of sin, the same is true when you lovingly and humbly do what's good and right. Quietly meet someone's need and you'll glorify the One who gave you the means to do so.

F. Richard Foster, author of, Money, Sex, & Power, writes: "There are three kinds of givers: the flint, the sponge and the honeycomb. To get anything out of a flint you must hammer it. And then you get only chips and sparks. To get water out of a sponge you must squeeze it, and the more you use pressure, the more you will get. But the honeycomb just overflows with its own sweetness. Which kind of giver are you? Giving with glad and generous hearts has a way of routing out the tough old miser within us. Even the poor need to know that they can give. Just the very act of letting go of money, or some other treasure, does something within us. It destroys the demon greed."

G. Charles Spurgeon supposedly said, "I take my text and make a beeline for the cross." In other words, any text of Scripture should lead us to Jesus and to His sacrifice on our behalf. Was there anything more generous ever given than when God the Father gave His only Son to purchase our redemption and adoption?! Nothing compares! We are racing into the season of Thanksgiving and Incarnation and without Jesus, those holy-days are meager and empty. So let's close with 2 Corinthians 8:9 (Amplified) because it is the Gospel in a sentence: **9 For you are recognizing [more clearly] the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ [His astonishing kindness, His generosity, His gracious favor], that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that by His poverty you might become rich (abundantly blessed).**

*** Close with Prayer...**

Scriptures, Videos, & Bonus Stuff

Acts 4:32-37 (ESV)

32 Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. **33** And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. **34** There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold **35** and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. **36** Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, **37** sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

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men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him. **7** After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. **8** And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much." **9** But Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." **10** Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. **11** And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things. **12** Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. **13** None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. **14** And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, **15** so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. **16** The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

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2 Corinthians 9:6-8 (ESV)

6 The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. **7** Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. **8** And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.

2 Corinthians 8:9 (Amplified)

9 For you are recognizing [more clearly] the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ [His astonishing kindness, His generosity, His gracious favor], that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that by His poverty you might become rich (abundantly blessed).

Three Kinds of Givers

By Richard Foster

"There are three kinds of givers: *the flint*, *the sponge*, and *the honeycomb*. To get anything out of a flint you must hammer it. And then you get only chips and sparks. To get water out of a sponge you must squeeze it, and the more you use pressure, the more you will get. But the honeycomb just overflows with its own sweetness. Which kind of giver are you? Giving with glad and generous hearts has a way of routing out the tough old miser within us. Even the poor need to know that they can give. Just the very act of letting go of money, or some other treasure, does something within us. It destroys the demon greed."

- Richard J. Foster, *Money, Sex & Power*.

Film Clips & Other Links

Millersport Covenant Church Sermon Podcasts (MP3s on iTunes)

<http://millersportcc.com/feed/podcast>

Teaching Children About Giving - John Piper

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ErE0o6g7Fks>

A Groundhog Preaches on Giving

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pj5GVhLvK7Q&feature=related>

A Cheerful Giver :-)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LAIiKjeIFa0>

Bonus Stuff

Proverbs 11:24 (ESV)

24 One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want.

Proverbs 11:24 (NLT)

24 Give freely and become more wealthy; be stingy and lose everything.

Proverbs 19:17 (ESV)

17 Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will repay him for his deed.

Acts 20:35 (ESV)

35 In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He Himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

2 Corinthians 9:6-11 (Amplified)

6 Now [remember] this: he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows generously [that blessings may come to others] will also reap generously [and be blessed]. 7 Let each one give [thoughtfully and with purpose] just as he has decided in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver [and delights in the one whose heart is in his gift]. 8 And God is able to make all grace [every favor and earthly blessing] come in abundance to you, so that you may always [under all circumstances, regardless of the need] have complete sufficiency in everything [being completely self-sufficient in Him], and have an abundance for every good work and act of charity. 9 As it is written and forever remains written, "He [the benevolent and generous person] scattered abroad, he gave to the poor, His righteousness endures forever!" 10 Now He who provides seed for the sower and bread for food will provide and multiply your seed for sowing [that is, your resources] and increase the harvest of your righteousness [which shows itself in active goodness, kindness, and love]. 11 You will be enriched in every way so that you may be generous, and this [generosity, administered] through us is producing thanksgiving to God [from those who benefit].

August H. Francke

Author Unknown

In the latter part of the 17th century, German preacher August H. Francke founded an orphanage to care for the homeless children of Halle. One day when Francke desperately needed funds to carry on his work, a destitute Christian widow came to his door begging for a ducat--a gold coin. Because of his financial situation, he politely but regretfully told her he couldn't help her. Disheartened, the woman began to weep. Moved by her tears, Francke asked her to wait while he went to his room to pray. After seeking God's guidance, he felt that the Holy Spirit wanted him to change his mind. So, trusting the Lord to meet his own needs, he gave her the money. Two mornings later, he received a letter of thanks from the widow. She explained that because of his generosity she had asked the Lord to shower the orphanage with gifts. That same day Francke received 12 ducats from a wealthy lady and 2 more from a friend in Sweden. He thought he had been amply rewarded for helping the widow, but he was soon informed that the orphanage was to receive 500 gold pieces from the estate of Prince Lodewyk Van Wurtenburg. When he heard this, Francke wept in gratitude. In sacrificially providing for that needy widow, he had been enriched, not impoverished.

Quote by J. D. Douglas (Biblical Scholar)

"Where our bread is concerned, it is a material matter. Where our neighbor's bread is concerned, it is a spiritual matter."

Quote by Amy Carmichael

"You can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving."

Quote by Charles H. Spurgeon

"Giving is true loving."

Quote by F.F. Bruce

"God bestows His blessings without discrimination. The followers of Jesus are children of God, and they should manifest the family likeness by doing good to all, even to those who deserve the opposite."

Quote by Albert M. Wells

"Sharing what you have is more important than what you have."

Quote by Martin Luther

"I have tried to keep things in my hands and lost them all, but what I have given into God's hands I still possess."

Quote by Augustine

"Where your pleasure is, there is your treasure; where your treasure is, there is your heart; where your heart is, there is your happiness."

Quote by C.S. Lewis

"I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc., is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charitable expenditures excludes them."

Quote by John Wesley

"When a man becomes a Christian, he becomes industrious, trustworthy and prosperous. Now, if that man when he gets all he can and saves all he can does not give all he can, I have more hope for Judas Iscariot than for that man!"

Quote by John MacArthur

"God made all of His creation to give. He made the sun, the moon, the stars, the clouds, the earth, the plants to give. He also designed His supreme creation, man, to give. But fallen man is the most reluctant giver in all of God's creation."

Quote by Tim Keller

"A lack of generosity refuses to acknowledge that your assets are not really yours, but God's."

Anonymous Quote

"When it comes to giving until it hurts, most people have a very low threshold of pain."

Quote by George Mueller (Founder of English Orphanages)

"God judges what we give by what we keep."

Quote by William Carey (Missionary to India)

"I was once young and now I am old, but not once have I been witness to God's failure to supply my need when first I had given for the furtherance of His work. He has never failed in His promise, so I cannot fail in my service to Him."

Quote by Selwyn Hughes (English Pastor & Author)

"Remember this--you can't serve God and money, but you can serve God with money."

Quote by Charles H. Spurgeon

"In all of my years of service to my Lord, I have discovered a truth that has never failed and has never been compromised. That truth is that it is beyond the realm of possibilities that one has the ability to out give God. Even if I give the whole of my worth to Him, He will find a way to give back to me much more than I gave."

Quote by Randy Alcorn

"The more you give, the more comes back to you, because God is the greatest giver in the universe, and He won't let you out-give Him. Go ahead and try. See what happens."

Quote by Randy Alcorn

"By giving, we enter into and participate in the grace of Christ. We worship. By giving in concert with our brothers and sisters in Christ's body, we jointly worship him, moved by each others' example and mutual participation. In the building of the tabernacle, building of the temple, and repair of the temple, it was the corporate involvement of the community of saints in which the spirit of God moved so dramatically to produce extravagant giving. The same was true with the New Testament saints of Jerusalem in the early chapters of Acts and those in Macedonia spoken of in 2 Corinthians 8."

Quote by J.D. Rockefeller

"Think of giving not as a duty but as a privilege."

Quote by J.D. Rockefeller

"I never would have been able to tithe the first million dollars I ever made if I had not tithed my first salary, which was \$1.50 per week."

Quote by Winston Churchill

"We make a living by what we get; we make a life by what we give."

Quote by Anne Frank

"No one has ever become poor by giving."

Ben Franklin on Collections by George Whitefield

"I happened soon after to attend one of his Sermons, in the Course of which I perceived he intended to finish with a Collection, and I silently resolved he should get nothing from me. I had in my Pocket a Handful of Copper Money, three or four silver Dollars, and five Pistoles [Spanish coins] in Gold. As he proceeded I began to soften, and concluded to give the Coppers. Another Stroke of his Oratory made me ashamed of that, and determin'd me to give the Silver; and he finish'd so admirably, that I emptied my Pocket wholly into the Collector's Dish, Gold and all." - From Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography.

Million Dollar Inheritance

Source Unknown

A man had a heart attack and was rushed to the hospital. He could receive little company and was not to be excited. While in the hospital a rich uncle died and left him a million dollars. His family wondered how to break the news to him with the least amount of excitement. It was decided to ask the preacher if he would go and break the news quietly to the man. The preacher went, and gradually led up to the question. The preacher asked the patient what he would do if he inherited a million dollars. He said, "I think I would give half of it to the church." The preacher dropped dead.