

Pr Mark Turner: A Lifestyle of Generosity (23/2/19)

Introduction:

Today we will be talking about how to create a lifestyle of generosity - systematic giving.

On page 30 of our little textbook - 7 Week Journey to a more Generous Life - you will find a really helpful list that will, in some ways, deal more fully with today's topic of consideration.

Systematic Giving:

George Müller was a man of great faith, and, it seemed at times, even greater generosity. He had a burden to look after orphan children - so he started an orphanage (with virtually no money!). Running this orphanage, and then the many that followed it, was basically a continual exercise in faith and love. He loved the children, and would pray for God to meet their needs daily. There were a great many times in which God opened doors miraculously for Mr Müller and their staff; and, throughout the course of his lifetime George Müller and his team cared for approximately 10,000 orphaned children (with virtually no money!). It is an amazing story! If you have not read his biography, it is something that would greatly inspire you.

"Are you giving systematically to the Lord's work, or are you leaving it to feeling, to impression made upon you through particular circumstances, or to striking appeals? If we do not give from principle systematically, we shall find that our one brief life is gone before we are aware of it, and that, in return, we have done little for that adorable One who bought us with His precious blood, and to whom belongs all we have and are." George Müller

Systematic giving (Sister Betsy - as the SDA pioneers affectionately called it) is a method that enables us to give intentionally, rather than emotionally.

It is commonly recognised that in today's church people are more likely to give to specific projects than they are to give systematically. This can be attributed to many things, but ultimately we shouldn't need to be emotionally manipulated in order to give.

"This matter of giving is not left to impulse. God has given us definite instruction in regard to it. He has specified tithes and offerings as the measure of our obligation. And He desires us to give regularly and systematically.... Let each regularly examine his income, which is all a blessing from God, and set apart the tithe as a separate fund, to be sacredly the Lord's. This fund should not in any case be devoted to any other use; it is to be devoted solely to support the ministry of the gospel. After the tithe is set apart, let gifts and offerings be apportioned, 'as God hath prospered' you." Ellen White, The Review & Herald, May 9, 1893

1 Corinthians 16:1,2

The Context:

Chapter 16 begins with a sentence that, had we been reading along sequentially, could come as a bit of a jolt.

In Chapter 15 Paul has just been sharing about the value of the gospel, how the resurrection affects our position as believers, etc, etc.

To the casual reader it would seem that he leaps from the grandiose message of the gospel and the resurrection down to the somewhat mundane - church collection.

Or is it that in the mind of the Apostle Paul the collection for the saints is simply the flow-on from gospel?

The Text:

Giving is to be a personal responsibility!

- "let each one of you lay something aside..."
 - Referencing the parable of the talents that we spoke about a few weeks ago:
 - Do you sometimes think your small contribution is too small to make a difference?
 - The man that had one talent seemed to think so, but he too had a responsibility to give, and, as a result of his unfaithfulness, he lost even what he had. For what we do not use, will some day be taken away. So share what you have while you can!
 - Do you think you don't have anything to give?
 - We all owe God what He has asked us to return - a tithe (tenth). You can't afford not to tithe!
 - Pr Mark shared the story of a man in one of his churches a few years ago who struggled with the thought of returning the tithe to God because he had so little to begin with. But, as we discussed last week, God promises that He will bless us and meet our needs if we commit ourselves to Him by this act of trust. So, as we step out in faith, even if it doesn't look like we have enough, God will provide for our needs!

Giving is to be a priority!

- "on the first day of the week..."
 - When Pr Mark was a university student in New Zealand for three years he was given a students allowance of \$120. Out of this allowance he would tithe his tenth - \$12, pay his board of \$100 to the people who were accomodating him, put in \$5 of offering. This meant that he would only have \$3 left over for expenditure every pay. Meaning that everything above and beyond that must be left as a matter of faith.
 - There were many occasions in which Pr Mark saw God's hand providing His need as a confirmation that he was making the right choice in making God his first financial priority.
 - Once throughout his time he needed a new pair of brown shoes, but couldn't afford to buy a pair. So he was praying for brown shoes until God provided them for him (without him asking).
 - Another time he was in need of feed for his horses. It was in the middle of winter and the fields where his horses were grazing were no longer feeding his horses, but Mark couldn't afford to continue to buy them feed because he'd run out of savings. Then someone at uni offered to have the horses at their place free of charge (with Mark being requested to do a bit of work for them afterwards as payment). Again, God had provided for his needs; demonstrating that if we trust Him, He will supply all our needs.

Giving is to be in proportion to our income!

- "storing up as he may prosper..."
 - In Luke 12:13-21 Jesus tells a parable about a man who was not proportionately generous. He had a great year on the farm and in trying to decide what to do about all his surplus he decided to build bigger barns. The purpose of the parable was to illustrate how covetousness can be a killer. In Hebrews 13:5 it tells us that contentedness is the antithesis of covetousness.
 - Instead of getting more, more, more - like the man in this parable, we should recognise in our abundance a call to give more, more, more!
 - Our abundance provides an opportunity for proportionate generosity.
 - In Matthew 6:19-21 Jesus tells us to avoid laying up for ourselves treasure on this earth, but instead to invest in the kingdom.
 - In Jesus' encounter with a rich young ruler He counselled the man to give all he had to the poor (seeing that for this man his riches were a source of covetousness - a weight that would keep him from investing in the kingdom).

"Let each regularly examine his income, which is all a blessing from God, and set apart the tithe as a separate fund, to be sacredly the Lord's. This fund should not in any case be devoted to any other use; it is to be devoted solely to support the ministry of the gospel. After the tithe is set apart, let gifts and offering be apportioned, "as God hath prospered" you."

Ellen White, The Review & Herald, May 9, 1893

There is one final challenging statement from our friend George Müller that we should consider today. That also being a call to proportionate giving.

"Therefore may I affectionately beseech and entreat my beloved Christian friends to take this to heart, and consider that hitherto they have been depriving themselves of vast spiritual blessings, because they have not followed the principles of giving systematically, and giving as God prospers them, and according to a plan; not merely just according to impulse--not as they are moved by a missionary or charity sermon, but systematically and habitually giving on principle, just as God enables them. If He entrusts to them one pound, to give accordingly a proportion; if they are left a legacy of a thousand pounds, to give accordingly; if He entrusts them with ten thousand pounds, or whatever it may be, to give accordingly. Oh, my brethren, I believe if we realised the blessing, we would give thus on principle; and, if so, we should give a hundred times more than we do now." George Müller

Challenge:

There are at least three take-home messages from the message today:

1. Make an effort to be systematic in your giving - not only emotional.
2. Give God the first fruits - not the left overs.
3. Give in proportion to your abundance - if you have been blessed with much, give much.