

September 24, 2023

Generosity – part 3

“Where Should We Give?”

Malachi 3:6-10

Intro:

Generosity, they say, begins at home.

We’ve come to the halfway point in our sermon series on generosity, and I hope that as we have been looking at some of the foundational principles of generosity and giving, that you have found the series to be helpful in opening up space for generosity in your lives in new and exciting ways. Generosity that truly flows from a heart shaped by God is not a chore, but a joyous opportunity that can lift the soul and catch a greater glimpse of God at work in this world.

So far, we have broached the subjects of why we give and how we are to give.

Today, we are going to explore the subject of where our giving and generosity should be directed.

Let’s take a moment and allow Bob Webber from the CBWC Foundation to introduce this step for us. You can watch Video #3 at cbwcfoundation.ca/generosity

If you heard last week’s message, you might recall that I made a point of letting you know that it wasn’t going to be a message focused on making sure you knew that you should be generous towards the church – towards Argyle Road Baptist Church. Well, this week, as was even noted by Bob in the video, I can’t really say that. Today you will hear that your local church is a good place to channel your generosity, but there is another point that needs to be made before we can get into the nitty gritty of discerning which organizations we should be giving to.

Giving To God:

I opened with the phrase “Generosity begins at home”. I would like to add another phrase to the list: “Home is where the heart is.”

So who has your heart?

In the Malachi passage that we read earlier, this exact question is being asked by God of His people. The history of God’s people has been one of God being faithful in his promises, and his people being less than faithful. Time and again they fail to follow through with their promises and to live in obedience to the agreements that have been made between God and the people. It could be argued that this has been going on ever since God first made his promise to Abram that from him would come a great nation who would be God’s people. The exact moment of failure is not the important piece for us, nor is it the important piece for God as he speaks through Malachi.

He is giving the people, yet again, the opportunity to repent so that they will not be destroyed by His wrath.

The problem is that the people don’t see themselves as having strayed away from God. “When did we do such a thing?” they are asking. They are playing innocent and ignorant. So God changes his approach. He asks the people if it is right that his people should cheat Him. Which He then accuses them of doing.

Again, the innocent response: “When have we cheated you?”

They have fallen for the bait. They thought that they were being clever and that they could trick God into not being able to prove the claims He was making against them. But God is not to be tricked. This is His interrogation. It is His calling to account of the people, not the other way around.

God pounces on their response and the feigned innocence. He knew this would be their reply and so He was ready for it. In this moment of rebuke it is not the laws of food or marriage or worship that they have broken that He catches them

with. He catches them with their lack of giving, their lack of generosity. And in the second half of verse 8, we find the foundation for the answer to the question of where we should be directing our generosity.

Our generosity, our giving, is first and foremost to be directed and given to God. I am sure that the Israelites of Malachi's day, and all the history leading up to that time, were generous after a manner. They probably did help others. They probably did give to causes that they wanted to champion. But they did not give to God.

It is a posture shift. When we give to a cause or to a person, it becomes about them – or about us. How will our donation be used? Do we have some control over that? What are the stipulations that we place on such generosity? All of these, and more, questions get in the way of fully and truly releasing our generosity. In a sense it is released but not really released. Our heart, as it were, is not properly in the generous act.

But, if our heart is in the proper place – meaning that it is properly centered on God, then generosity is always done from the position that we are giving our time and talents and resources to God and only to God. This is not a plug to say that we can only give to a church or Christian organization. No, we are to give to God.

This opens us up to be able to give more freely and to truly see generosity as a blessing and not a burden. God has already claimed our generosity. And not only that, Scripture tells us that God has already determined where and how that generosity is to be used. Numbers 18:24: "because I have given them the Israelites' tithes, which have been presented as sacred offerings to the Lord."

When we give as though we are giving to God, then it becomes a sacred thing. A sacred thing that God then uses to bless others. And honestly, taking this approach makes it much easier for us to discern where He is at work, and where what we have to offer in generosity, God has already assigned. The decision isn't up to us, but it is confirmed through taking time to engage in listening prayer.

How to Discern:

This brings us to the point where we ask how we discern where we should be directing the generosity we have placed in God's care.

Bob offered a good starting point for us in the video. As he mentioned, there are more worthy agencies and organizations out there vying for our generosity than we can possibly ever count, let alone help. How do we decide? Bob suggested that we use the evangelism pattern given by Jesus in Acts 1:8 as a good way to bring some focus. The evangelism model is that you start close to home (Jerusalem), then a little further out, such as within the province or country (Judea and Samaria), and finally going global as a missionary (the ends of the earth).

We can divide our giving into those similar categories. Identify somewhere close to home to be generous towards, maybe within the province or country, and then something that reaches to some other part of the world. Again, there is no end to the potential recipients, and it is also not just about financial giving, although in some cases that might be the easiest or the way that God is directing you.

This helps to narrow things down a little, but there is still more that can be done to help open up just exactly where we should be directing that which we would give to God for the blessing of the world.

For this I think Wesley Willmer is helpful. This comes from his book "God and Your Stuff". He suggests that our interests and our giving can actually line up together. As you seek to discern where God would have you give, explore areas of interest that you have and ask God if those are areas that He would have you direct your generosity towards. At first glance it might sound like it is more about you than about God, but if your heart is in line with His – if you have given to Him your heart (that is your home is found in Jesus), then you will be interested in the

things that He is interested in. Approaching it this way will also help you to see and experience greater joys in the act of being generous.

Giving to the Church:

In the video Bob did put in a plug for giving to the church, and that is a valid place to direct your local giving. When God directed the Israelites to give back to Him the tithe and offerings from what they received, He had dedicated those resources to go to the temple and the work that was done there. So it is right for me to point the church out in this context. It is also a valid option to address since as Christians, the church should be one of the areas that we have a deep interest and investment in. Perhaps the church is the only place that you are able to direct giving towards. And that is ok as well. From what is given to the church, this church specifically, donations are directed onwards nationally and internationally.

So how can you give to the church?

We have spoken earlier about putting to use the gifts and talents that God has given – through involvement in the various ministries of the church, as we are exploring with the cards on the back wall, but there is also the area of giving financially to the church.

There are a few ways that you can give financially to ARBC. We have an offering box at the back of the church that you can put a physical offering into. We have the option of pre-authorized payments – which is a very helpful tool for being faithful to giving as you work through your budget. We also have the option of e-transfers. Most of us don't carry physical cash on us and so being able to e-transfer on Sunday morning is helpful. On the screen behind me there is a QR code that links to the giving page of our website, where you can find all of those options listed and how to access them. This code is also at the back of the church on the offering box.

Conclusion:

Once we have adjusted our process of generosity to be directed towards and by God, then the next step will be to determine how much and what that will actually be. The Bible has some things to say about tithes and offerings – and the difference between them, and we will look into that next week.

Let's pray.