

The Miracle of a Generous Heart

Session 5: Future Living

Welcome to session five in our series, the miracle of a generous heart. My name is Claire West and I'm the Minister of small groups here at University Heights Baptist Church. Today we will be talking about impacting future living, by the way that we live our life today. How will your generosity today change the lives of future followers of Christ?

When I was a child, my dad decided that he wanted to trace the genealogy of his family. Most of his family lived in Blanco County and had for many, many years. And so for several summers, my dad and I traipsed all over the state of Texas, in libraries and courthouses, looking at microfiche (for those of you that remember what that was) and old articles trying to find the genealogy of our family. And it ended up not just being our family, but most of the families in Blanco County. And in fact, he published a book that's in the Library of Congress, tracing the genealogy of the families that settled Blanco County. So that was my experience summer after summer after summer, trying to discover our past. Now I've shared openly about my dad many times, and those of you that are close to me know that my relationship with Him was not a great one. Not horrible either, but certainly did not impact my faith. In fact, I didn't come to faith in Jesus until I was 14. I was invited to First Baptist Church of Fredericksburg to a youth group meeting on a Wednesday night by my best friend at the time, Jeremy Tobias. And there I heard the gospel and was saved. I was also baptized in that church, and later served as a youth intern for that church before I went into full time ministry.

So my upbringing really could not be classified as being in a Christian home. So fast forward some years. When I met my wife, Elisa, I was attending Howard Payne University. She was also a student there and was one year ahead of me. We fell in love, got engaged and got married. And I really didn't understand how much God was really fixing to turn my entire perspective of what living the Christian life was. Remember that my background was more about history, about what people did, where they lived, when they were born, when they died. There wasn't a whole lot of faith in all of that. And I was beginning to see that faith lived out as something very unique. Elisa's family was a very strong, faith-based family. Her dad was a minister of music for years and then a senior pastor. He still pastors a small country church near Brownwood. Her grandparents were believers. And so I was thrust into this family of people who were all walking after Jesus. Not just going to church, not just reading their Bibles, not just the basic things. I was watching her dad meet the needs of the poor in the community in which they lived. I watched faith turn into action, and it was very impactful for me. So this morning, we will talk about living today in a way that impacts the future. Richard is going to be preaching about our legacy. It's the same concept, right? How do we live now so that it impacts our future living, not just our family? Because I really believe it does. How does it impact the church? How does it impact the lives of future believers? And it does, it really does.

We're going to look at three passages this morning. The first begins in I John 3:16. It says, "We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in Him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth." We've been talking about this for weeks now, this idea of gracious living. Of not only giving to the church, but also giving to brothers and sisters that are in need. When we see the need, we do it. That's very important. I saw Elisa's dad take action to meet needs and it changed my perspective on what it meant to be a believer, what it meant to be a follower of Christ. Not only did he see the need, and say, "I'll pray for you.", he went beyond that step and said, "I will pray, and I will meet your need because God has been faithful and gracious to me. Therefore, I will also be gracious to you." That's because Alan knew what the love of God was. And he knew his only response, his only acceptable response when he saw the need, was to love them and to meet their need.

So let's turn over to the book of James. James talks a lot about faith and works. So let's begin in James 2:14. "What use is it my brother if someone says he has faith, but he has no works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing, and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled.", and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so, faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself." It doesn't do us any good to say, "I feel bad for you." Or even only, "I will pray for you." If Jesus had the same faith, that same faith and said, "I see this awful predicament you're in, living a life of sin. I do feel bad for you, and it does touch me to the heart." If that was it, we would all be lost. Jesus gave himself up for the church, He gave himself up for you and He gave himself up for me. He did that so that we would know love. When we abide in Him, which is something that's fundamental to our church, and know his heart, when we are confronted with the world, when confronted with need, we not only get to share the gospel, we get to put out money where our mouth is. Our response can only be to meet the need, because faith without an action step, without making a difference in that person's life, is dead.

It's pretty simple. So one of the things I decided when I met Elisa was to live out my faith in a real way. I spent all those summers with my dad, tracing genealogy, looking back through history, and seeing those that came before. I didn't know anything about them. I didn't know their names. I didn't know their history. At some point their legacy to me was somewhat lost. They were just people on a page with names that were similar to mine, but I didn't really know them.

The life that they lived back then really didn't impact my life. One of the decisions I made when I met Elisa and started living this life with her family, was that I wanted to plant a new family tree. I wanted to plant a family tree that was going to be built on faith and not just history; a faith that was worked out in my life, in the life of my spouse, and in the lives of my

children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren, and so on down the line. I wanted that to be something that was starting with me.

So why is it important for us to have action tied to faith? Why is that important?

Well, let's take a look starting in Philemon 1:4, "I thank my God, always making mention of you in my prayers, because I hear of your love, and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all the saints. And I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing, which is in you for Christ's sake. For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother."

That's why. When we live a generous life, when we live a grace filled life, it makes a difference in the lives of people. It makes a difference in the life of our spouse and in our family. It even, if we're fortunate enough, makes a difference in the lives of our grandchildren and maybe even our great grandchildren. And as those people grow and develop their spiritual life, walking with Jesus, it gets passed down generation to generation to generation. But not only that. What we do right now, today, not only impacts our family and our faith, but also impacts the church. It impacts the lives of fellow believers. When we see a need and we meet it, that's putting our faith into action. Then that good work is then passed on to somebody else and our generosity sees lasting effects. That leaves a legacy of grace filled living and generosity. It is an encouragement to the church and an encouragement to other believers. It is also something that is essential for us in our faith. God calls us to be generous. God calls us to be gracious. God calls us to a grace filled life.

So I'll ask you again.

How will your generosity today change the lives of future followers of Christ?

Discussion Questions:

1. Share about your family background. Was generosity something modeled to you as a child? If not, how did you learn to be generous?
2. Have you ever been prompted by the Holy Spirit to meet the needs of others? If so, please share.
3. Do you watch for opportunities to meet the needs of those around you, even if you don't have an established relationship with them?
4. How have followers of Jesus in your past influenced your living today?
5. Someone once told me, "Someone is always looking up to you." How are you going to live today to leave a legacy of generosity to those you never even knew were watching and following?