



# Extravagant GENEROSITY

The Heart of Giving

WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL ... WEEK 1, OCTOBER 11, 2011

## FROM STEWARDSHIP TO GENEROSITY

***“Giving, not getting is the way. Generosity begets generosity.”***

**— Luke 6:38, The Message**

A few years ago, I had the privilege of speaking at a training seminar at a large United Methodist church. My host was on staff at the church, and he described how he recently changed his title after reflecting upon the *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*. Formerly the Executive Director of Stewardship, he was now the Executive Director of *Generosity*. He, the other staff, and the congregational leaders decided “generosity” comes closer than “stewardship” to describing his purpose and role.

This made me think. What’s the difference between “stewardship” and “generosity”? What comes to mind when you hear those words? For what distinctive purposes are they best suited? How do people respond to those terms?

We are stewards of the earth. We are stewards of those things entrusted to us, inherited by us, and earned by us. We are stewards of our wealth and possessions and physical bodies. Stewards are people in ancient times who were trustees, who had responsibilities, who cared for things owned by someone else. Today you don’t hear much about stewards and stewardship outside the church; it’s language derived from our biblical roots and our church heritage. It risks becoming insider language, not easily accessible or immediately understandable by those new to the church. There is something slightly weighty, dutiful, and legal sounding about the word. I grew up hearing about stewardship, stewardship campaigns, and committees on stewardship. The language focused our attention on supporting the church financially.

Generosity is an aspect of character. It is an attractive quality which I aspire to and desire to see cultivated in my children. The opposite of generosity is selfishness, self-centeredness, greed and self-absorption. No stories from Scripture tell of people living the God-related spiritual life while fostering a greedy attitude. Generosity extends beyond merely the use of money, although it definitely includes that. There are generous spirits; generous souls; people who are generous with their time, with their teaching, with their love. Generosity finds many biblical sources, and is the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). It sounds more organic, more generative, less legalistic, less formal than stewardship. I have to explain to my teenage sons what stewardship means. They know generosity when they see it.

I admire and respect people who are generous, and I want to become like them. Generosity is not a spiritual attribute someone acquires apart from the actual practice of

giving. It becomes discernible through action. We never describe people as generous who keep everything for themselves and only serve themselves.

Generosity focuses on the spiritual qualities of the giver, derived from the generosity of God, rather than on the church's need for money. One of these terms is not superior to the other. Perhaps there are shades of differences in how they are perceived by young and old, those new to faith from those long-established in our churches. Using both wisely helps us to reach people at different places on the journey of faith.



- What has been your experience with the term “stewardship”? With “generosity”? What’s the difference between them?
- Which most helpfully inspires your giving as you seek to grow in the image of God and in service to Christ?



# Lakewood Presbyterian Church

*Thinking with Christ's mind • Loving with Christ's heart • Serving with Christ's hands*