

Sermon Response Guide:
Acts 2:43-45 "Devoted to Generosity" | Pastor Phil Rushton

Intro:

We are continuing our sermon series titled, "Devoted: The Markers of a Spirit Filled Church." We are taking a look at what the early Christian movement devoted themselves to following the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost.. This morning we are going to look at these early disciples' devotion to generosity. Their encounter with the power and provision of God, reoriented their relationship to money and possessions.

Jesus talks about money and possessions a lot in the gospels - more than many other issues. Jesus is aware of the fact that money can become a central and controlling idol in our life. Money can become the source of our devotion. Furthermore, our devotion to wealth can easily be justified as virtuous. It is hard to know when we cross a line from good financial stewardship to greed. Richard Foster writes, "Covetousness we call ambition. Hoarding we call prudence. Greed we call industry."

In the sermon this week we ask three questions:

1. How can we become generous?

Last week we zeroed in on the word "devoted" in Acts 2:42. The church devoted themselves to following Christ. This word is significant. It implies that the early disciples experienced a reorientation of their desires. Their generosity was not driven by guilt, shame, ego, or self-interest. No they had been captured by a compelling vision of what it looks like to follow God. This infused within them, a renewed devotion or desire to follow God whole-heartedly.

The early churches generosity flows out of their encounter with God. They found, in God, true power, purpose, and provision.

2. What does it look like to be generous?

There are times, in scripture, when God calls individuals to voluntary poverty. We think of the rich young ruler, for example, who was called to sell everything and give it to the poor. The broader picture of the New Testament, however, does not teach that as normative for everyone.

In Acts we notice that the selling of possessions and property was not required. It was voluntary. In Acts 4:35 we read that it happened "from time to time," not all the time. It was based on need. We notice, later in our text, that they met in people's homes for worship and fellowship, so not everyone gave up private property.

What we do have, however, is a picture of very radical, sacrificial generosity. The disciples gave in a way that was costly to them. They put the needs of others before their own. Though some still had possessions, they did not consider them their own. What they had belonged to God, and to others.

John Stott says it this way, "Already in the Old Testament there was a strong tradition of care for the poor, and the Israelites would give a tenth of their produce to 'the Levite, the alien, the fatherless and the widow.' How can Spirit-filled believers possibly give less?"

C.S. Lewis gives this advice. "I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. If our giving habits do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small. There ought to be things we want to do but cannot do because our giving expenditures exclude them."

3. Why are we called to be generous?

a. God cares for the poor and the vulnerable. Right from the beginning of the biblical narrative, we see that God has a special concern for the widow, the refugee, and the poor. That was what drove the ethic of generosity in the Mosaic law.

Jesus continues this call to care for the poor throughout the gospels. It grieves God's heart that some people have way too much while others do not have enough for basic nutrition and shelter. John Stott, writes, "That we have hundreds of thousands of destitute brothers and sisters is a standing rebuke to us who are more affluent. It is of the responsibility of Spirit-filled believers to alleviate need and abolish destitution in the new community of Jesus."

b. Generosity sustains the work of discipleship. It is interesting to note, in the Deuteronomy texts, that tithing went both to direct relief for the poor, and to the levites, who lead and served in the temple. In the New Testament, we see that early disciples put resources toward the poor and toward the support teachers and preachers of the gospel so they could devote themselves to the work of discipleship. Paul is clear about this in 1 Corinthians 9:14.

I believe it is vital for us to balance our giving to both direct relief work and the work of discipleship. For, if we neglect discipleship the work of charity and benevolence will suffer.

c. Generosity is good for us personally.

In Luke 12, Jesus teaches us that a life based on wealth and possessions leads to dissatisfaction and emptiness. Jesus says, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." I find this statement profound. Jesus is saying that true life does not consist in material possessions. This is not where life is found.

Richard Stearns writes, "I have often thought of the tithe as a kind of inoculation against the power that money can hold over us. By cheerfully giving away a small portion of our money, we become immune to the corrupting power it can have in our lives. When we tithe, not out of obligation, but out of love and obedience for God, we are making the bold statement that money has no power over us."

Questions for Reflection:

1. What stood out to you in the text / sermon today?
2. Why does God call us to practice generosity?
3. What are the barriers that get in the way of us practicing generosity?
4. How do we discern what God is asking of us in regards to generosity?
5. How is God calling you to practice generosity in the weeks / months to come?