

GOD'S GREAT GENEROSITY

In **Luke 6:38** we read the following in Luke's parallel account of the Sermon on the Mount: "Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you".

Jesus here says you give, and what happens if you do - "and it shall be given unto you". You give and God gives to you. Notice how much He gives to you - a "GOOD MEASURE". In other words He's not stingy.

How good is this good measure? Notice - "PRESSED DOWN AND SHAKEN". Have you ever opened up a box of cereal and you find it's only half full because when you press it down and shake it and open it almost half of it isn't there. Well God does more than that. When God gives you a blessing He presses it down, then shakes it then there's some area left you see. Then, what does He do? He fills it up again so that it's "RUNNING OVER". The point is here is that God gives generously.

What I'd like to do in this article is to look more closely at the second part of this verse and illustrate just how generous God is with a few short stories.

It is easy to underestimate God's love for us when we go through long trials or when we might suffer from besetting sins which seem to stop the flow of God's blessings in our life at times. The purpose of my sermonette today is to encourage us all to have a deeper faith in God's generosity and never underestimate the personal love that He has for each and every one of us.

The first story I'd like to look at comes from the life of Samuel's mother, Hannah. Samuel's father was a man named Elkanah. He had two wives, Peninnah and Hannah. Peninnah bore several children yet Hannah who was Elkanah's favourite wife bore no children.

Jealous of the fact that Hannah was the wife that Elkanah loved more, Peninnah mocked Hannah quite a lot because she had no children. This depressed Hannah greatly and on one occasion that they went up to Shiloh to sacrifice at the tabernacle of God, she prayed for a son. It was an intense sorrowful prayer from Hannah.

We read about her prayer in **1 Samuel 1:10-11**. "And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed to the LORD and wept in anguish. Then she made a vow and said, 'O LORD of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall come upon his head.'"

Hannah promised God that if He would give her a son she would give him to God as a servant in the tabernacle. God was very moved by her prayer and gave her a son. The real proof of the pudding that showed her humility and how sincere she was is that she followed through on her promise. Many people when they are in dire straits will make all sorts of promises to God and then conveniently forget about their promises after they are out of trouble. Hannah showed great faithfulness to her vow by giving up the very thing that she wanted the most back to God when she gave up Samuel to be a servant at the tabernacle.

God was very touched by her faithfulness and then gave her something well and truly over and above what she had asked for. We read about what God gave to her in **1 Samuel 2:21**: "And the LORD visited Hannah, so that she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters". She had only asked for a son yet because God was so moved by her faithfulness He chose to give her another five children.

There are many other biblical examples of God's generosity above and beyond that which was asked of Him such as God's provision for Ruth and Naomi, God restoring double to Job after his great trial and Solomon being given wealth and power when he only asked for wisdom to properly rule Israel.

The next story that I'd like to share with you comes from a book by Charles Swindoll entitled "Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back". Quoting a friend of his, he writes:

"We had a lovely couple in Dallas a number of years ago. He sold his business at a loss, went into vocational Christian work, and things got rather rough. There were four kids in the family. One night at family worship, Timmy, the youngest boy, said, 'Daddy, do you think Jesus would mind if I asked Him for a shirt?'

"Well, no, of course not. Let's write that down in our prayer request book, Mother.'

"So she wrote down, 'Shirt for Timmy' and she added, 'Size seven.' You can be sure that every day Timmy saw to it that they prayed for the shirt. After several weeks, one Saturday the mother received a telephone call from a clothier in downtown Dallas, a christian businessman. 'I've finished my July clearance sale and knowing that you have four boys it occurred to me that you might use something we have left. Could you use some boys shirts?'

"She said, 'What size?'

"Size seven.'

"How many do you have?' she asked hesitantly.

"He said, 'Twelve.'

"Many of us might have taken the shirts, stuffed them in the bureau drawer, and made some casual comment to the children. Not this wise set of parents. That night, as expected, Timmy said, 'Don't forget, Mommy, let's pray for the shirt.'

"Mommy said, 'We don't have to pray for the shirt, Timmy.'

"How come?'

"The Lord has answered your prayer.'

"He has?'

"Right.'

"So, as previously arranged, brother Tommy goes out and gets one shirt, brings it in, and puts it down on the table. Little Timmy's eye's are like saucers. Tommy goes out and gets another shirt and brings it in. Out back, out—back, until he piles 12 shirts on the table, and Timmy thinks God is going into the shirt business. But you know, there is a little kid in Dallas today by the name of Timothy who believes there is a God in heaven interested enough in his needs to provide boys with shirts."

The Apostle Paul describes God's generosity with the following words in **Ephesians 3:20**: "Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us". It's interesting Paul's choice of words. He doesn't just say "above all that we ask or think" but "exceedingly, abundantly above all we ask or think."

Now does God only give when we are good and generous or is God more magnanimous than that? We read the answer to that question in **Matthew 5:43-45** where Jesus says:

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust".

I remember a couple of times in my life where this was brought home to me in a very personal way. If there were a couple of times in my life when I least deserved God's generosity the times of these two incidents were right up there.

In my mind I knew that God loves us at all times but at the time of the first incident I thought that the only love that God could give me was His hard or tough love. Perhaps you've felt this way at times. I felt extremely depressed and even fearful of God's rebuke being emotionally at the lowest point of an

addiction I was battling with. There was no way He would give the other side of love, what we might call His soft love. At least, that was what I thought.

I was looking for something else when, quite by chance, it appeared as if God directed me to a passage in a book that was everything I needed to hear at that time. It spoke of God's incredible patience with us when we struggle with sins and compared God's working with us like marinating a piece of tough meat. There is simply no way to rush the process. God has given us a lifetime to soak in His grace to become the people that He wants us to be. It was very moving and it was as if God was putting His arm around me and saying, "It's OK. We have plenty of time to work on this. Look, we'll get there in the end."

On another occasion, for a temporary period of time, I was stubbornly pursuing my own way on a matter and thought that God wouldn't possibly give me any blessing until I turned from my selfish pursuit. Yet again I had God figured out totally wrong. In a way that simply could not be put down to co-incidence, He dropped into my lap a major blessing that had me totally stunned that He would bring into my life at that time.

Like Hannah did with Samuel, our Heavenly Father also gave up His only Son. He gave up what He cared for most, for us and to make possible our forgiveness and to give us the chance to one day become a part of His eternal family. A friend of mine calls this plan of salvation, where God plans to bring us lowly dust of the ground into His Family, as the "Clod to God Program". It's a pretty apt description.

In conclusion, let's not underestimate or lose faith in His love and generosity when we go through hard times. We need to remember that He truly is "a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" as it says in **Hebrews 11:6**.

God loves and takes great pleasure in giving. The depth of His love and generosity is so much over and above what we might expect or ask of Him. Paul writes in **Romans 8:31-32**: "If God *is* for us, who *can be* against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"