

Monday:

And all of us... can be mirrors that brightly reflect the glory of the Lord. And as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him and reflect his glory even more. 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 (NLT)

Reflection: If we were to look up the opposite of generosity in a cartoon dictionary, we would see a picture of Scrooge McDuck. Generosity's opposite is stinginess or hoarding. It is the behavior that comes from being insatiable. It says, "more, more, more" and "mine!" Generosity is the natural result of feeling rich... not being rich, because Scrooge McDuck was rich in material goods, but he operated from a scarcity mentality. He believed that wealth is limited and therefore he would only get his share if he kept it all to himself and away from others.

Jesus wasn't like that. He came to this world and He gave all of Himself. He knew the secret of generosity... that the more you give of yourself the more that returns to you. One of His closest friends when He walked this earth said this about Him:

We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our (each other). 1 John 3:16 (NLT)

I used to think that John was talking about Jesus' death on the cross. But now I think there was more than just His ultimate sacrifice on John's mind when he wrote those words...

John spent every day for 3 ½ years with Jesus. Yes, John was a witness to Jesus' death on the cross but he was also witness to 1,277 days of Jesus sacrificing His life in different ways. Read through the gospels and you will find plenty of times when Jesus served even though He was tired or sad.

Now we're told to do the same thing. As children of the King of kings, we are wealthy beyond measure! We are not guaranteed financial wealth (although the Bible does tell us how to put money to work for us to be good stewards of our earthly resources and gain even more to work with); but we are privy to the perspective of God. Our Heavenly Father knows that in His economy there is always enough of the most valuable resource: love.

How would your day change if you adopted the standards of your Father, the King of kings and Lord of lords, rather than follow the tune of this world's scarcity mentality? What would you have to focus on to be mindful of your wealth and nobility as a child of God? What would it mean for you to reflect the glory of Jesus with your life today?

Prayer: Father, I want so badly to reflect the glory of Jesus in my life... forgive me for the times I'm a reflection of something else. Today I pledge to lay my life down for the people You have entrusted into my life. Give me the grace to treat them the way Jesus would if He were here in my place. In Jesus Name, amen.

Tuesday:

Be careful what you think, because your thoughts run your life. Proverbs 4:23 (NCV)

We do live in the world, but we do not fight in the same way the world fights. We fight with weapons that are different from those the world uses. Our weapons have power from God that can destroy the enemy's strong places. We destroy people's arguments and every proud thing that raises itself against the knowledge of God. We capture every thought and make it give up and obey Christ. 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 (NCV)

Reflection: What is health and what is wholeness? These are words our society doesn't seem too concerned about- at least not in the same way that God is concerned about them. Our society in fact seems to be more interested in treating the symptom of our brokenness rather than creating health- God is interested in helping you with both.

I read a book a few years ago called, "Uprising". As I read Erwin McManus' chapter on wholeness a very strange feeling came over me. He grew up in Florida and I grew up all the way across the country in California but his early childhood was so similar to mine I felt like I was reading my own biography. I know the details couldn't have been as similar as I think they were but my childhood memories are very murky to me now.

I do know that at a very early age I started having problems at school. From the time I got into kindergarten until I had graduated from high school (which I barely did by the way, but that's a story for another time) my educational life was more about getting out of trouble than learning. In fact, by the time I was in early elementary school (I'm not sure exactly when because like I said, it's all very murky to me now) I was seeing the district psychologist so they could try to figure out what was wrong with me (no... they never did figure it out... some people are still working on it to this very day). And my mom tells me that I always pretended to be sick so that I could stay home. The Dr. finally told her to go down to my school and find out what was going on. Eventually my mind convinced my body and I started having some fairly interesting health problems.

My nightmares scared me to death and I guess that's how you could characterize my childhood- I was always afraid. I could hide it if I wanted to, but in order to do that I had to tell myself stories about the past and more importantly the future that would be powerful enough that my mind would actually believe it was all going to be ok.

Now I'm probably being dramatic here but as a kid who didn't know how to be "whole" I was truly struggling. But one thing I did learn during that time was the power of the mind. Most people might not think of me as having a terribly strong mind, but I'll tell you one thing- I can usually convince my mind of whatever I want to convince it of so that I can feel better in the moment. Maybe that's actually a sign of how weak my mind is but however you slice it- your mind has to believe everything is going to be ok tomorrow if today is going to be worth living. That's why God is SO concerned about your thoughts. That's why Proverbs 4:23 tells you to:

Be careful what you think, because your thoughts run your life.

I can tell you this is absolutely true. I can still think back to some of the stupider things I've ever done and make myself sick if I'm not careful. So I follow the Apostle Paul's advice in 2 Corinthians 10:5:

Capture every thought and make it give up and obey Christ.

I used to be a slave to my thoughts. I was afraid of them and what they could do to my day if some of my more unpleasant memories showed up uninvited. Not only did I have to put my energy into dealing with these thoughts but I felt guilty just for having them. Does that ever happen to you? Do you ever mess up your day because of guilt that comes from thoughts you have. One day I was reading a book by Max Lucado, entitled Just Like Jesus. He said that you are not responsible for every thought that comes into your mind- you're just responsible for

what you do with those thoughts. He quoted 2 Corinthians 10:5 and said that what we need is a guard shack at the entrance to our minds. Then whenever a thought comes along you capture it and bring it to Jesus. If it's a good thought you let it pass. If it's not so good and you don't want it in your mind then you slap it around and kick it out.

I tried that and guess what? It worked for me! And eventually those "not so helpful" thoughts slowed down- a lot! They still come back every now and then, just like some old childhood friends, but now I know what to do with them. I make them obey Jesus.

But there's one more step if you're going to move into the realm of health and let God transform you into someone who is truly "whole". You need to start focusing on the good stuff from your past. If I spent my entire day focusing only on the lousy stuff that happened to me I'd be a truly depressing person to be around. But if I choose to look back on my childhood and remember the truly amazing stuff that happened to me (and there was actually a lot of truly amazing stuff there when I chose to look) then I can reformat the way I feel today. It's almost like magic... but it's not magic, it's God's miracle of transformation. When you do your part, God does His. When you change the way you think, God changes who you are and how you feel. He gives you "strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow."

So take a lesson from the Apostle Paul. He had plenty of bad things happen to him. He was imprisoned several times. He was shipwrecked, threatened, stoned (with big rocks... not the kind of "stoned" we think of today) almost to death, and he was beaten by the authorities several times. Yet he chose not to let those bad things define him. He chose to remember/focus on the good in his life. And so after years of doing God's work on this earth, as he sat in a Roman prison cell awaiting his execution order from Caesar Paul could write:

Summing it all up, friends, I'd say you'll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious-the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse... Do that, and God, who makes everything work together, will work you into his most excellent harmonies.
Philippians 4:8-9 (MES)

Sounds like a pretty good deal to me. Now let's do it.

Prayer: Father, today I want to think about what I'm thinking about. Instead of being a slave to my thoughts I choose today that I will decide what I think about. I will choose to focus on the good... to be careful of what I think... and to take every thought that comes into my mind captive so my life will be about the amazing future I have rather than things I wish had gone differently in my past. In Jesus Name, amen.

Wednesday:

Dear friends, if God loved us that much we also should love each other. No one has ever seen God, but if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is made perfect in us. 1 John 4:11-12 (NCV)

Trust steadily in God, hope unswervingly, love extravagantly. 1 Corinthians 13:3 (MES)

Reflection: There are two mentalities that threaten generosity. One is insatiability, but the other masquerades as a friend; it is the concept of fairness.

Generosity isn't fair. To play the game of generosity, you either shoot for extravagant love, or you go home. Fair isn't a valid play.

Fair is a child's word. It is like the Law of Moses. It was designed to train the clueless what it means to look not just at our own desires, but the desires of those around us. We cannot be generous unless we've first grasped fairness, because we all begin as children who see the world not as it is, but as though it revolves around us (I blame my mom for that belief... she always told me how wonderful I am and I could never figure out why everyone else didn't see what she did ;o).

Fair is an important lesson in elementary schools. Fair is an important lesson on playgrounds. Fair is even an important lesson in courtrooms.

But there is no fair in the kingdom of God. Jesus came to show us a God of extravagant love. I am so grateful that Jesus doesn't treat me fairly! Instead He treats me generously and mercifully. That may not be what I deserve, but it's what I need in order to even get in the game! And that's what He asks me to give others – the generosity and mercy He's given me. If I choose to give less then I'm no longer playing His game... I'm playing someone else's game and believe me... you don't want to get into playing Satan's games.

How would you approach today differently if you traded the concept of fairness in for generosity? What would it look like to shoot for extravagant love? How might playing the generosity game change you whether you win, loose or draw?

Prayer: Father, I thank You that You don't treat me fairly... as I deserve to be treated but with extravagant love, extravagant mercy and extravagant grace. Teach me what it would look like in my life if I loved, accepted and forgave the people around me extravagantly. In Jesus Name, amen.

Thursday:

Give, and you will receive. You will be given much. Pressed down, shaken together, and running over, it will spill into your lap. The way you give to others is the way God will give to you. Luke 6:38 (NCV)

Reflection: God loves us, accepts us and forgives us as an unconditional gift, but He can tell whether we've truly understood that gift by how we treat others. God isn't so much saying, "Love others or I'll take back the love I've given you;" He's saying, "If you're not loving others, I know you haven't really fathomed the love I've offered you." Do you see the difference? Us being generous isn't a condition of God's gift to us - it is meant to be the natural result of our gift... what happens when we truly see God's gift for what it is and what it means for us.

Generosity doesn't mean that we give people whatever they want! Remember that God's love is a balanced love. If we want to love like He loves, we will ask ourselves, "What will be most generous to this person in the long run?"

God loves us too much to give us whatever we want. He gives us what He knows will bring out our best selves and our best lives. Sometimes that's easy and fun and sometimes it's really not. He doesn't step in and prevent us from learning from the consequences of our choices. And He

doesn't prevent us from learning lessons that will help us to overcome our weaknesses. That's not generous in the long run.

So how do we know what the most loving and most generous thing is? Now that's God's kinda question! We can't read people's hearts like God can, and He knows that. He wants us to do the best we know how and let the chips fall where they may. He'll be with us to help us learn from our mistakes if we've miscalculated. He'll celebrate any action taken from a pure heart. We don't need to be successful in order to get credit from God. Learning what love and generosity really look like is one of the purposes of living this life here on earth. We take one step at a time and pray that our baby steps will bring us closer and closer to the full life Jesus had in mind for us. It's not always an easy journey, but it's a journey full of lessons and blessings, traveled in the company of God, and leading us ever more fully into the image of His Son, Jesus.

Do you have a better offer? What might it be like if you placed all your chips on this process just for today?

Prayer: Father, I want generosity to be something that defines my life. I don't always know what the most generous... what the most loving thing will be when I'm dealing with the people in my life. But today I pray that you would open my eyes so that I would start to see others the way You do. Today I pledge to be a generous person to those You bring into my life. In Jesus Name, amen.

Friday:

They were incredibly happy, though desperately poor. The pressure triggered something totally unexpected: an outpouring of pure and generous gifts... What explains it was that they had first given themselves unreservedly to God and to us. The other giving simply flowed out of the purposes of God working in their lives. 2 Corinthians 8:2-5 (MES)

Reflection:

Generosity just feels good! It is as much a blessing to us as it is to those we are being generous to. However, we can never guarantee how our acts of generosity will be received by others. They may be thankful, they may be oblivious, or they may say, "So you've given me an orange. Why didn't you peel it?"

In the end, being generous to others is not really about them. It's a game played between us and God. And God always repays your generosity whether the people we choose to be generous to appreciate our gestures or not.

When we're being generous we are engaging in the work of God. We are collaborators in His plan to richly bless the world. Being generous makes us more like God. He is always there to see any act of generosity, no matter how insignificant it may seem. And we can always take pride (not become arrogant but feel pleasure at our accomplishments) in our generosity. Generosity gives life to the giver.

Prayer: Father, Today I choose to be generous... even if others don't appreciate it. Forgive me for the times I've attached gratitude as a condition for my generosity to others. Give me Your heart to be a blessing to the world around me... In Jesus Name, amen.