

What Makes a Person Generous?

1 Samuel 30

Mark Batterson writes of an experience he had when he was four-years-old. His grandfather had a rare and valuable fossil collection. That collection was like the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil – it was the one thing that was off limits. As you might have guessed, Mark Batterson was Adam: one day he “couldn’t resist the temptation to handle one of the fossils.” Batterson says he will never forget the feeling he had when that fossil slipped from his hands and fell to the floor, and broke into pieces. Decades later he can still feel those emotions.

There are times when a four-year-old boy needs to be disciplined and needs to internalize the consequences of his actions. But this was not one of those times. When his grandfather walked into the room and saw what had happened, he bent down, picked up his grandson and gave him a hug. Batterson writes:

He didn’t scold me. He didn’t tell me that what I’d done was wrong. All he did was hold me. It was the most graceful hug I’ve ever received, and without his uttering a word, I heard him say loud and clear, “Mark, you’re far more valuable than a fossil collection.”

(Batterson, *Wild Goose Chase*, pp. 103-104)

Mark Batterson’s grandfather embodies the term “generous.” A generous person lavishes others with grace that they haven’t earned and that they don’t deserve. Instead of being stingy, generous people lavish others with gracious words, gracious actions (and reactions), and hard-earned resources (it could be money or possessions or knowledge/skills).

Today we are going to explore the question, “What makes a person generous?” How do we become like Mark Batterson’s grandfather? We are going to answer that question by looking at an example of generosity in the life of David in 1 Samuel 30.

David’s Example of Generosity (1 Samuel 30)

We learn in chapter 27 that David and his 600 men are living in Gath with the Philistines. Since the Philistines were enemies of Israel (and powerful), David and his men were relatively safe there. Eventually the Philistines allowed David and his men to settle in a place called Ziklag. Chapter 29 records that the Philistines prepared to go to battle against Saul and Israel. David and his men leave Ziklag to go to battle with the Philistines against Israel. Achish, the Philistine king, trusted David and wanted him and his men to go to battle with them, but the Philistine commanders didn’t trust David. They feared that when they got into battle that David and his men would side with Israel. Eventually Achish took his commander’s advice and dismissed David and his men back to Ziklag.

Chapter 30 records that when they arrived back at Ziklag they found that the Amalekites had taken captive their women and children captive and had burned their city to the ground. When David and his men realize what had happened, they “lifted their voices and wept until there was no strength in them to weep” (v. 4). To make matters worse, we read this in verse 6 that the people blamed David (presumably because he had led all the men away to fight with the Philistines):

6 Moreover David was greatly distressed because the people spoke of stoning him, for all the people were embittered, each one because of his sons and his daughters. But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God.

This is what often happens when there is tragedy: grief turns to anger and somebody has to pay. The people's grief became embitterment and they began talking about stoning David. He was their leader, after all, and he shouldn't have left the women and children defenseless. The people's anger is a threat to David's life and a threat to God's promise to make David king.

Brueggemann points out that when King Saul faced a similar crisis of leadership, he consulted a medium (see chapter 28). By contrast, David "strengthened himself in the LORD his God." Even though David was far from perfect, he knew that the Lord was *his God* (not in a possessive sense, but in the sense that God was bound by covenant to him). David "inquires of the Lord" concerning what he should do next.

7 Then David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelech, "Please bring me the ephod." So Abiathar brought the ephod to David.

The ephod was an ornate vest that the priest wore when he entered the presence of the Lord.

8 David inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall I pursue this band? Shall I overtake them?" And He said to him, "Pursue, for you will surely overtake them, and you will surely rescue all."

The Lord gave David every assurance that he would be successful in rescuing the women and children and everything else taken. In verses 9 and 10 we learn an interesting thing:

9 So David went, he and the six hundred men who were with him, and came to the brook Besor, where those left behind remained. 10 But David pursued, he and four hundred men, for two hundred who were too exhausted to cross the brook Besor remained behind.

Just as when David pursued Nabal, he took 400 men with him and left 200 behind. This time the 200 were left behind because they "were too exhausted to cross the brook Besor." No value judgment is placed on the fact that these 200 men were too exhausted to go into battle. But this detail will resurface later in the account.

A providential thing happened next. David's men found a young man in the field who hadn't had food or drink for 3 days. Compassionately, they brought him into their camp and gave him food and drink. They then brought him to David, who questioned him. It turns out that he was an Egyptian who had been a servant to the Amalekites and had actually participated in the pillaging of Ziklag. His master had abandoned him in the wilderness because he fell sick. He had basically been used up and thrown away by the Amalekites. Significantly, David didn't have him killed on the spot. Rather, he questioned him in order to find out where he could find the Amalekites.

15 Then David said to him, "Will you bring me down to this band?" And he said, "Swear to me by God that you will not kill me or deliver me into the hands of my master, and I will bring you down to this band." 16 When he had brought him down, behold, they were spread over all the land, eating and drinking and dancing because of all the great spoil that they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from the land of Judah. 17 David slaughtered them from the twilight until the evening of the next day; and not a man of them escaped, except four hundred young men who rode on camels and fled. 18 So David recovered all that the Amalekites had taken, and rescued his two wives. 19 But nothing of theirs was missing, whether small or great, sons or daughters, spoil or anything that they had taken for themselves; David brought it all back. 20 So David had captured all the sheep and the cattle which the people drove ahead of the other livestock, and they said, "This is David's spoil."

This was a dramatic change of fortunes for David. A few days earlier the people were talking about stoning him. Now they declared, "This is David's spoil"; they hailed him as the type of leader who brought them great wealth.

Next we are told what happened when David and the 400 men returned to the 200 men at the brook who were too exhausted to fight. Two distinct attitudes surface toward the 200.

21 When David came to the two hundred men who were too exhausted to follow David, who had also been left at the brook Besor, and they went out to meet David and to meet the people who were with him, then David approached the people and greeted them. 22 Then all the wicked and worthless men among those who went with David said, "Because they did not go with us, we will not give them any of the spoil that we have recovered, except to every man his wife and his children, that they may lead them away and depart."

Verse 22 mentions "wicked and worthless men among those who went with David" (NIV – "evil men and troublemakers"). Back in chapter 22 we were given a profile of the original 400 men who attached themselves to David in the wilderness. This is what we learned there:

2 And everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented, gathered to him; and he became captain over them. Now there were about four hundred men with him.

When you think about it, if you had a good life and lived comfortably under Saul's reign, you wouldn't choose life in the wilderness with David. And so David attracted a rather unsavory band of men: those who were distressed, in debt, and discontented. When we come to chapter 30, we aren't completely surprised that there were "wicked and worthless men" who didn't want to share the spoils with those who were too exhausted to fight. Their attitude was, "The only thing they deserve is their wives and children. Once they have their wives and children, they should lead them away and go." [The verb translated "lead" was commonly used of driving/leading cattle. . . a very dehumanizing choice of words.]

In the passages we've studied the past couple of weeks David hasn't been especially virtuous. But here in verse 23 he "regains his voice." His voice is strong and clear and generous.

23 Then David said, "You must not do so, my brothers, with what the LORD has given us, who has kept us and delivered into our hand the band that came against us.

Whereas the wicked/worthless men spoke about "the spoil that we have recovered," David speaks about "what the Lord has given us." Furthermore, it was the Lord who had "kept" them and "delivered into [their] hand the band that came against [them]." David saw their victory and the resulting plunder as the Lord's doing. Even though they had done the fighting, it was the Lord who had worked. This would be the Apostle Paul's attitude in 1 Corinthians 15 when he said that he had worked harder than all the apostles, but it wasn't really him, but the grace of God "with" him (1 Cor. 15:11). For David, the dominant fact was that God had been generous to them by giving them victory and plunder. Therefore, he argued, they should be generous to the 200 who were too exhausted to fight:

24 "And who will listen to you in this matter? For as his share is who goes down to the battle, so shall his share be who stays by the baggage; they shall share alike." 25 So it has been from that day forward, that he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel to this day.

Everyone would get the same share of the spoils of war – both those who fought and those who stayed with the baggage. David doesn't argue that they deserve to receive the same spoil as the others. Maybe they deserved it and maybe they didn't. On the one hand they were doing something valuable by staying behind and protecting their possessions; but they hadn't put their lives on the line as the 400 had. David didn't give them the same share of the spoils because they deserved it. ***David was generous to them because he understood that God had been generous to him.***

I love David's attitude here. He was able to put aside comparisons that made him feel like he deserved more than others. He was simply satisfied that he had done what God wanted him to do (pursue the Amalekites). He didn't resent that he had to go to war exhausted and others got to stay back at the brook. He didn't look down on others because they played a different role than him. All that mattered was that he had done what he was supposed to do. That freed him up to see God's generosity to him ***and*** to be generous to others who did what they believed they were supposed to do.

I don't need to tell you this, but there is a crying need in our day for generous people – people who exhibit this type of generosity day in and day out. The world doesn't need people who occasionally act generous. The world needs generous people.

We each need to receive the generosity of others. For starters, each of us needs to realize, "I need and want people to show me this type of generosity!" Many of us here today are like the 200 who were left at the brook Besor: we're exhausted and weak and worn out; we really don't think we can go to battle right now. Honestly, some of you here today need to come to the conclusion that unless somebody else is generous to you, you aren't going to make it.

- You may need generosity financially (a gift to help pay the bills).

- You may need generosity in the form of forgiveness; you need someone to tell you, “You have wronged me, but I’m not going to make you pay for it. I’m simply going to bear the offense.”
- You may need generosity because you’ve committed yourself to do things that (it turns out) you really can’t do – you don’t have the time, the energy, or the will. You need a generous person to tell you, “It’s okay; we’ll figure out something else.” This isn’t a license to be irresponsible; it’s just facing the fact that all of us get in over our heads sometimes.
- You may need the people around you to be more generous in how they talk to you. It sure would be healing if they just listened instead of challenging everything you say.

We all need to receive the generosity of others. This may be incredibly hard for you if you’re the strong, competent one who is always generous to others. But the NT makes clear that we are interdependent in the body of Christ to the point where we *have* to have what others can give us. If you really don’t think that you need others’ generosity, you could be in a pretty dangerous place spiritually; you’re cutting yourself off from the grace of God that He so often gives through other people. We each need to receive the generosity of others.

We are each called to show generosity to others. We are called to be like David, being generous to people who may or may not have worked as hard as we have and who may or may not deserve it. We shouldn’t be tight-fisted, stingy people who make others feel like they have to measure up before they will receive anything from us. No, we are called to be generous people in what we think about others, in what we say about others, and in what we share with others (resources).

And like David, this freedom to be generous flows from an understanding that God has been generous to us. God has been shockingly, permissively generous to us. When we were His enemies, He sent His Son to die for our sins. He continues to lavish His grace upon those who believe in Jesus. In 1 Corinthians 4:7 Paul asked the Corinthian believers, “What do you have that you did not receive?” In other words, every single thing we have was given to us by God. The realization that God has been generous to us should fuel our generosity to others.

Can you think of ways that God wants you to be more generous to others? Are there ways that you need to treat others more like God has treated you? Perhaps your heart is hardened toward someone you live with or work with. Perhaps you need to be more gracious to those around you who are exhausted and worn out. Perhaps you need to be like Mark Batterson’s grandfather: someone has sinned against you, and you need to forgive that person just like God in Christ has forgiven you. Or perhaps you have resources with which you can be generous (money, a car, skills, etc.) Can you think of ways that God is calling you to be generous to others just as He has been generous to you?

In a few minutes we are going to observe the Lord’s Table. The bread and the cup have the ability to bring us back to the generosity of God like very few things in this life. When you eat the bread, you are remembering that the body of Jesus was broken for you – when you didn’t deserve it and hadn’t earned it. When you drink the cup, you are remembering that Jesus’ blood brought about a new covenant – one in which our sin has been removed as far as the east is from the west, one in which God lavished upon us His very Spirit, one in which God promises, “You

will be My people, and I will be your God.” The Lord’s Table brings us back to the generosity of God in a profound way.

We practice open communion here at Faith. Regardless of your church affiliation or denominational affiliation, if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, we invite you to come to the Lord’s Table. We will pass the bread first; please hold the bread until we’ve all received and then we’ll eat together. We’ll do the same with the cup. If you haven’t entered into a relationship with God through faith in Jesus, we’d ask you to let the bread and the cup pass; we are very glad that you’re here with us today, but we don’t want this to be an empty ritual for you. Use the time to consider what Jesus has done for you on the cross; consider the possibility of receiving the life He wants to give you.