

STEWARDSHIP AND MISSION

Kenan ended the call and reached for his seatbelt. He was headed to Willow Creek Gardens. It was a senior living community for people fifty-five and older. Every third Saturday of the month, Kenan went grocery shopping for two seniors from his church.

Both women had been using delivery services for their groceries, but Kenan overheard them talking about a bad experience. So Kenan had volunteered to do the shopping for them. That was one year ago.

“Doesn’t a young man like you have better things to do, than to shop for old women?” Sister Taylor had asked.

“Not at all! I’m happy to do it,” Kenan had told the women.

Then when Kenan said he would supplement the two women’s grocery bill with \$30 each, they had objected.

“This is something the Lord has put on my heart,” Kenan said.

Kenan persuaded them both and knew that the Lord had provided for him. More so, it seemed as if Kenan’s heart had enlarged. He knew it was because the Holy Spirit was at work in him.

Kenan had also taken the idea to his pastor as a quarterly activity for the men’s ministry. “We have other senior members who may benefit from ‘grocery day,’ and we can use some of the men’s ministry funds or raise funds to offset their groceries.”

Kenan’s pastor had been ecstatic and approved the idea.

Kenan rang the buzzer outside the big building. “Right on time,” came the voice of Sister Taylor over the intercom. “Come on in.”

1 When a person lives a life of service and generosity, what actions do they take?

2 What are some practical ways to show the goodness of God to others?

3 What does it mean to you, to be a witness to Christ?

⁶ When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?

⁷ And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.

⁸ But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

⁶ Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

⁷ He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

A Kingdom of Power

Jesus accomplished His earthly mission. He came to earth as a man and became obedient to death on a cross (Phil. 2:8). Throughout His life, Jesus taught what it means to walk according to God’s design, to live as a human in the way God intends. By His death and resurrection, He has defeated sin and death—providing access for all to a restored relationship with God.

But shortly after the resurrection, Jesus’ followers are still grappling to understand the full implications of what has happened. Jesus tells His disciples to remain in Jerusalem to await the gift of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 1:6, they gather around Him to ask if the time has come for Jesus to “restore the kingdom to Israel.”

The messianic hopes of Israel were based on expectations of a conquering king. They wanted someone like King David, who successfully defended the people and waged war against Israel’s enemies: solidifying borders, glorifying the name of God, and ensuring a strong and prosperous nation. God promised David a descendant, the Messiah, who would reign forever (see 2 Sam. 7:12). This is what Israel and the disciples expect when the Messiah arrives. They want to see a rerun of the glory days of Israel’s national might, under the leadership of a worthy king who would turn the Romans out and set God’s people free from foreign oppression.

And they knew that Jesus was Israel's king. Everyone was waiting for Him to take the throne, to reign like a traditional king. The disciples' question speaks to this hope. But Jesus responds in an indirect manner, acknowledging that He *will* reign as king and His throne *will* be established (v. 7). However, the Father has decided the appropriate time, and it's not for them to know. We still eagerly await the return of Jesus and establishment of His kingdom in glory. In the meantime, the ministry of Jesus continues—through His followers. Jesus comforts the disciples with the promise that the Holy Spirit is coming to grant them power to be His witnesses (v. 8).

In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit is active in people's lives, but usually only for specific people for specific times (for example, Joseph [Gen. 41:38]; the craftsmen of the tabernacle [Ex. 31:3], Joshua [Num. 27:18], King David [1 Sam. 16:13]). Figures of the past were filled with the Spirit to do the work of God. But after the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Spirit comes in abundance to all believers (Acts 2:4). Everyone can imitate Christ and be His witnesses. It is through the power of the Holy Spirit that believers bear witness for Christ, as the good news about Him goes from Jerusalem, into all of Judea and Samaria, and eventually to the whole world (Acts 1:8).

1 Why do you think the disciples are so curious about Jesus' role as the king of Israel?

2 How do we announce and welcome Jesus' kingdom right now, even while we wait for His return?

3 What are ways that the Spirit empowers us to be witnesses?



This is the view from the Mount of Olives, where Luke records that Jesus ascended to heaven after giving these final instructions. While this location is within East Jerusalem today, in Jesus' era it was considered outside the city, in the town of Bethany (see Luke 19:29).

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³ For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; ⁴ Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. ⁵ And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God. ⁶ Inasmuch that we desired Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also finish in you the same grace also. ⁷ Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also.

⁸ I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love.

⁹ For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.

³ For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, ⁴ they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people. ⁵ And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us. ⁶ So we urged Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. ⁷ But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

⁸ I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. ⁹ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

A Plea for Generosity

The empowering Spirit gives Jesus' followers boldness to spread the good news about salvation. This means that many people—Jews and Gentiles—soon decide to follow Jesus and are being filled with the Spirit. They begin to live Spirit-led lives, in community with one another.

In his letter of 2 Corinthians, the apostle Paul, who planted many churches among the Gentiles, writes to the church in Corinth, asking for them to demonstrate generosity. Before Paul makes his dramatic and final trip back to Jerusalem, he spends about five years collecting

money from Gentiles to support the Jewish Christians back where the gospel message first began to spread, in Jerusalem.

In 2 Corinthians 8, Paul asks the Corinthian church to donate generously. He uses the Macedonian churches as an example—citing their abundant giving. In verse 3, Paul tells the Corinthians that the Macedonian churches gave “as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability.” He says they pleaded for the privilege of serving God’s people by giving in this way. The Macedonian churches had little, but gave much. The church at Corinth probably had more since Corinth was a wealthy city. The members could also give generously, if they choose to. Paul argues that giving to the urgent needs of brothers and sisters in the faith is a privilege. It isn’t to be done grudgingly, but with great joy, knowing that generous giving is one of the ways believers become more like Christ.

In verse 7, Paul points out the many gifts the Spirit has given the Corinthian believers. They excel in faith, speech, knowledge, earnestness, and love. But Paul wants them to excel at *giving*, which is another gift of the Spirit (Rom. 12:8).

Paul doesn’t command that the Corinthians donate generously, but he does say that this request is a test of their love (2 Cor. 8:8). Following Jesus is not only a mental agreement to a set of beliefs. It requires action, often sacrifice. He points out in verse 9 that Jesus, although He was deserving of everything (as God), became a poor human for the sake of our salvation. Jesus lived according to God’s will, and believers are meant to imitate Him (Eph. 5:1–2), to be formed into His likeness (2 Cor. 3:18).

1 Why do you think generous giving is one of the gifts of the Spirit? Is it a gift for all, or for only some?

2 Do you believe it’s easier or harder for wealthy people to show generosity?

3 Why do you think that Paul was so insistent that Gentile churches give back to the needs of Jewish Christians in Jerusalem?

A Spirit of Generosity

When I was young, my family would take summer trips to Chicago. We would go to museums, shows, shops, and tour all of the historical parts of the city. These trips were filled with fun and excitement for us as we got to see a city that had so much to offer. But we couldn't help but notice, as we walked around the city, there were many people on the streets—people who looked desperate and seemed to have no comfortable place to go. On one of these trips, my brother (only about eight), was moved with compassion for those experiencing homelessness. When we got home, he sent his piggy bank money to Pacific Garden Mission, a ministry dedicated to sharing Jesus and hope with those in need in Chicago. My brother received updates from the mission for years afterward.

As I was remembering my brother's generosity at a young age, I couldn't help but feel inadequate. At this stage in my life, I have never been more financially stable. And yet, I find myself thinking about the next stage of my financial planning, not for how I can share out of my abundance with others. My instinct is to be generous toward my current and future *self*, and it requires the work of the Holy Spirit to help me shift my thinking beyond what I want.

When Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to His people, they gained boldness to be generous toward the needs of one another. They were urgently sharing the blessings of the gospel! They allowed the Spirit to transform them.

As we continue in our own discipleship journeys, we need to continually be asking the Holy Spirit to grow this fruit in us. There might be areas where we've seen growth, and perhaps there are other areas (like generosity) where we need the Spirit to stretch us. The goal is to become more like Jesus, for He is generous in every way.

1 Do you find generosity easy or difficult? Why?

2 What are some ways that people have shown you generosity throughout your life?

3 How can you continue to grow in generosity?

Imitating a Generous God

God is generous to us, and He invites us to be generous to others, which is inseparable from the good news of Christ's kingdom. Take the time now and in the week ahead to inventory your available resources. Are there ways you can give with freedom and joy, especially to those in your community? Maybe there are local groups for whom you can commit to prayer, which is extremely valuable. Ask God to show you where and how He wants you to show His generosity to others.

Father, here are some resources and skills that I devote to You. Prompt me acts of joyful giving.

Key Text

For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich. —2 Corinthians 8:9 KJV

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. —2 Corinthians 8:9 NIV

Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

Week of February 23 through February 28

- Mon.** Nehemiah 4:15–23—Work Together for the Common Good.
- Tue.** Romans 15:1–17—Welcome One Another in Christ.
- Wed.** Proverbs 3:27–32—Do Good whenever You Can.
- Thu.** Ecclesiastes 5:4–8—Fulfill Your Vows.
- Fri.** Philemon 10–21—Bear One Another's Debts.
- Sat.** James 2:14–26—Provide for Others and Demonstrate Faith.

Next Week: Mark 12:28–34; James 2:14–17

We will continue to speak about generosity to others. What is the greatest financial or physical need that you notice in your community right now?