

A People who are Generous

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[0 : 0 0] This is a sermon from King's Church West, William. Today we're going to be looking at Deuteronomy chapter 15 and 1 to 11.

! Now I want to start with a question.! It was possibly because I was coming here, but when I thought of that question, I actually thought of one or two of you, if I'm honest, and I'm so thankful for you.

But the one that came to mind was a man called Bert Elliott, who Jocelyn, my wife and I, had the privilege of living in Peru for some years. And we met Bert when he was in his 70s.

And by that stage, he'd had a part in planting many churches, starting many churches across the north of Peru. And in his 70s, he started a school, as one does when you're in your 70s, for children so they would have a better education.

And when he was about 80, I wanted him to slow down, partly because I felt embarrassed at how much he was doing compared with me. Now, he did begin to slow down.

[1 : 1 6] So when he was beginning to slow down in his mid-80s, he thought, well, what am I going to do now? And so he decided, as one does when you're in your mid-80s, you know, he decided that he would start a rehab centre for those with drug addiction problems, yeah?

Just as one does when you're in your mid-80s, yeah? Sadly, he began to lose his mind a bit. And so they needed to make sure that he had no money on him when he went, because they would ask him for money and Bert would very generously just give out money to them.

Bert managed to keep his hands open and his heart open in the years that I knew him, and before that, certainly.

60s, 70s is right to the end. And today, I just want to think a little bit about what it takes to keep our hearts and our hands open. One example from the Old Testament, and then we'll go to Deuteronomy.

Nehemiah, the last thing you see Nehemiah, a great leader in the Old Testament doing, is he's organising firewood for the altar in the temple.

[2 : 2 5] An example from the New Testament, the Lord Jesus. The last thing you see him doing, or virtually the last thing, he sees his mother, and he sees his disciple John, and he says, Mother, here is your son, and son, here is your mother.

He's just got an open heart, an open hand, right until the end. That's how I want to be, yeah? Let's look at Deuteronomy chapter 15, and I think we've got it on the thing, so I'll maybe read it from there.

At the end of every seventh year... Clock. You must cancel the debts of everyone who owes you money. This is how it must be done. Everyone must cancel the debts, the loans they have made to their fellow Israelites.

They must not demand payment from their neighbours or relatives, for the Lord's time of release has arrived. This release from debt, however, applies only to your fellow Israelites, not to the foreigners living among you.

There should be no poor among you, for the Lord your God will greatly bless you in the land he is giving you as a special possession. You will receive this blessing if you are careful to obey all the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today.

[3 : 36] The Lord your God will bless you as he has promised. You will lend money to many nations, but will never need to borrow. You will rule many nations, but they will not rule over you.

We will read the rest of the passage a bit later. But firstly, why do we need to keep our hands open? This passage is all about being generous.

Yeah? Generous with our hearts, generous with our hands. That is what it is about. And when you look at one of your hands, I do not know how you feel in your heart in these days.

If you feel as if you have got a kind of... The Lord's giving you quite a generous heart towards others. It's not just money. It can be time. If you have a home, it can be opening up your home.

Just spending time with people. It can be money too. Sharing skills. But I wonder when you think of yourself, if your hand is quite open just now in your life, or if you feel that actually you've begun to close in a bit and not just quite so open.

[4 : 40] Yeah. And in speaking about being generous, I don't think the Holy Spirit is wanting to do this. I don't really think he's wanting a kind of tug of war with a gripped hand and trying to pull it open.

I don't think that's how he works. I think what he does is he just gently taps us sometimes. He says, will you just open up your heart, open up your hands to others a bit, yeah?

Our natural position... Look at your hands for a moment, Jess. I think your natural position is probably holding your hands like that. Most of us naturally are not like that. When we open our hands, sometimes some of us in praise, this isn't very natural, actually.

Normally, I mean, it's fine, but it's not very natural. What would normally is a little bit like this, and the Holy Spirit would just want us to open up in terms of our generosity. Okay, we'll go through these.

Why be generous? Well, firstly, God is generous to all. In this passage in verse 15, which we haven't read, he says, you used to be slaves in Egypt, and I freed you.

[5 : 47] You didn't deserve it, but I freed you. And we have been freed, those of us who know the Lord Jesus, we have been freed from our sins, yeah? We've been freed from things that used to hold us back, yeah?

I spoke a few weeks ago, a couple of months ago now, actually, with a man from Botswana, and he had grown up in a religious background, and he wasn't sure that his sins were forgiven.

And so I taught him something of the grace of God as the best I could do. And then the following week, it was as if he had understood the message of the grace of God.

But I said, go home and ask God to forgive you for everything, if that's what you feel in your heart. And the next week when I met him, I said, when you went home, what did you do?

Do you remember what I suggested? Yeah, you suggested I pray, asking God to forgive me for everything. And what did you do? I said to him, he said, yeah, I prayed, because it's by the grace of God, and I believed that.

[6 : 47] And I'm a bit of a doubting Thomas, so I wanted to be sure. So I said to him, and after you prayed that, how did you feel? After you prayed to ask God to forgive you for everything?

And he answered me with one word. He said, relief. Relief. And I thought to myself, you've got it, mate.

You've got it. Relief. And God was generous to us. We sometimes sing Amazing Grace, and it says, it was grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved.

And with being generous to others, with an open hand, we can give relief. We can give relief. Secondly, God cares for the poor. The Bible's full of that.

But in this particular passage, he says, every seven years in Israel, you're to forget the debt of anyone who owes you money. It was quite radical.

[7 : 46] It's not for us, as Christians today, that you have to, every seven years, forget any debt that someone owes you. That's not the teaching. But the teaching was to put a brake on the rich.

That they weren't to get richer and richer and richer at the expense of the poor. Yeah? It was God throwing an almighty spanner in the works of their greed. And they had to just hand, they just had to forget the debt.

Now, today, we also need to be generous. God has been generous with us. I'm well aware that with this kind of topic, it can come across like teaching people to be good.

And that's why I started with the example of the Holy Spirit just tapping open. Tapping open our hearts. Because God has been generous to us.

God cares for the poor. Forget their debts, someone might say. Some of them would have been chances. Dodgy chances. They got into debt because they mismanaged their money.

[8 : 59] Because they spent more than they had. Just forget their debts. Let them off the hook. For God demonstrates his love to us.

In that while we were sinners, some of us dodgy chances. Christ died for us. Thirdly, why do we need to keep our hands open?

Because it's awful to be poor. It's awful to be helpless. It's. I had a car crash three weeks ago.

Not my fault, but I can tell you that afterwards. And after a bit of a hassle with the insurance company, they gave me some money. Actually, I'm waiting for the money tomorrow.

But they're in process of that. And in the meantime, I went out and bought a kind of new second-hand car. Yeah. And I managed to park it on a hill going slightly uphill. Yeah. And there was a car in front of me.

[9 : 56] And there was a car behind me. And it has one of these kind of automatic handbrakes. I don't know if any of you have seen it. I like the handbrake that you can actually pull up, you know, and you know what you're doing. Well, this is one of these little things that you put two or three fingers behind.

Anyway, I got in a bit of a mess. And every time I seemed to put the foot on the accelerator, instead of going forward out of this space, it would go back a bit. And then I'd try again, and it would go back another bit.

At that point, I got out of the car, and I looked behind, and I had about half a metre left. So I knew I only had a certain number of chances left. So I said, Guy, pull yourself together.

You can do this. I can't remember if I prayed or not, to be honest. Took the thing off, put it in, and I slid back again. I did it again.

And I slid back again. And I was left with about two inches between me and the car behind. Yeah. It was awful. I felt helpless. I couldn't get out of this. It's awful to be in need without hope.

[11 : 01] And yes, I did knock the car behind me. And no, thankfully, there was no damage. I remember when I was a forest worker at the Forestry Commission, and I couldn't really make ends meet.

I could only pay the rent, and I could put fuel in the car because I needed a car to get to the forest to work. Yeah. And I could get the most basic of food, tuna bolognese and smoked haddock.

At that time, it was cheap. And that's all I had. And someone taught me a skill, how to use a chainsaw. And that person, they kind of got me out of that hole. Yeah. It's awful. That economic hole, that financial hole, when I just couldn't make ends meet.

They just taught me a skill, how good it is. Fourthly, God sees we can get weary. I was delighted when I heard that announcement. A rest Sunday.

That's a great idea. I really hope you can do it. That's a lovely idea. What you don't read in this passage in Deuteronomy chapter 15 is that once every seven years, it was actually a year of rest.

[12 : 02] They had the year off. They didn't sow their crops like they normally did. So these people were at rest. Kings West Lothian, I so admire you.

I really do. I admire how you've served for years now. And having open hands, as various of you do, and open hearts, is actually, it causes tiredness.

Yeah? A few years ago, I was getting root canal treatment. I don't know if any of you have had root canal treatment. Yes, it is that bad. You're right. And, you know, they put the normal number of metal sticks in your mouth.

Sorry, if someone's a dentist, I'm sure there's a better way of saying this. But the metal sticks in your mouth, and sometimes they ask you a question when you've got them all in. You know what it's like. And it was agony. And when the dentist had eventually finished doing whatever they were doing in my mouth, the nurse came, I was obviously completely frozen out of fear, out of exhaustion, out of emotional exhaustion.

And the nurse came up to me, and she said, Guy, you can breathe now. Do you know, you can keep a hand open.

[13 : 22] You can keep a heart open. Only if there's sufficient rest. It's not possible otherwise. They did this in a year of rest.

They released these debts. They were able to be so generous once every seven years because they were in a season of rest. And in Christ, I don't know to what extent each of us have gathered this, but we have rest in our souls.

We have relief because our sins are forgiven. We are ready for Christ to come back. We live out of a position of rest.

How good I am practically in that is another matter. But in my saner moments, that is what I realize. Five. We're family.

Four times in this passage, it talks us about us being family. And it talks especially about helping people within the family of God. Some of you will have kids.

[14 : 25] And in the morning, you have to dress the kids. And you put their shoes on. And you maybe take them to school. Or if they're older, they go to school on their own. Yeah? Now, my guess is that you have a sense of priority for your own kids.

That you don't go down the street to kind of put the shoes on someone else's kids. And the word of God says we have a sense of priority for our own family that is the church.

It doesn't mean we never help anyone else. Yeah? But we do have a priority for the family of God. And in this passage, they were explicitly told not to let the foreigners off from their debts.

That's probably because the foreigners were there doing business, actually. And any debts they had was more a business investment rather than poverty. But it also teaches a priority amongst the people of God.

Six. Thank you. I'm going to read this next bit again. There should be no poor among you. For the Lord your God will greatly bless you in the land he is giving you as a special possession.

[15 : 26] You will receive this blessing if you are careful to obey all the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today. The Lord will bless you as he has promised. You will lend money to many nations, but we will never need to borrow.

You will rule over many nations, and they will not rule over you. Bye, please, Regan. Thank you. Everything we have is a loan. Everything we have comes from God.

Recently, after the car accident, the insurance company, they gave me a hire car. I treated that hire car extra special.

When I went to a Munro in my head, climb a hill, in my head I thought, am I going to send them a text and ask them to bring another pair of shoes so they don't get into this hire car with their muddy boots on at the end of the walk?

I thought, Guy, you can't do that. That's a bit mean. You've got to be generous in your heart, Guy. You're speaking on that in a few weeks' time. But when something's on loan, you really look after it, and everything that we have is on loan.

[16 : 26] It doesn't really belong to us. God helps us when we are generous. God will help us when we're generous. God helps us.

pass to the other window a coin that in that currency was the smallest coin you could have. I think we still have a penny.

Do we still have a penny? Yeah? It was one of those. And I just heard, as she did that, and she wasn't doing it for me to see at all.

That wasn't what was happening here. I just heard her say, take it, sister. I was blown away by one person in extreme poverty, helping another person in extreme poverty.

And these two were both godly women of faith. And they lived in their hearts like wealthy people.

[17 : 56] They understood the grace of God towards them. I remember when Jocelyn and I were really hard up one time and someone brought a rabbit to the house.

And I think they thought the rabbit was for the girls, for our two daughters. But we didn't actually have any food for the following day. And that rabbit's chew was jolly good. I have no way of knowing what the little copper coin meant to that other widow.

But I know what the rabbit meant for me and my family. Yeah? I can't remember now how we explained it to the two girls. But those were mums here.

I can't remember how we got round it. But the Lord blesses. Okay, we'll press on. Let's keep our hearts and our hands open to those who need us. And if there are any poorest lights in your towns when you arrive in the land the Lord your God has given you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted towards them.

Instead, be generous and lend them whatever they need. Do not be mean-spirited and refuse someone alone because the year for cancelling debts is close at hand.

[19 : 00] Do you get that? Every seven years you had to forget the debts. So if some chancer came to you asking for you alone after six years and six months, God says, don't do that calculation that they've only got six months to pay the debt back.

Yeah? Don't be mean-spirited. If they're in need, help them. If you refuse to make the loan and the needy person cries out to the Lord, you will be considered guilty of sin.

By the way, the New Testament in James chapter 5, in a different situation, makes it clear that where there is injustice, the Lord hears the cries.

Of those who are exploited. In the New Testament, yeah? Give generously to the poor, not grudgingly, for the Lord your God will bless you in everything you do.

Yeah, we need to have wisdom. We can't help everyone. We do need to have wisdom. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't be open-handed. I'm just going to finish up with some practical things.

[20 : 03] In the last verse, there will always be some in the land who are poor. Jesus quoted that, by the way. This is why I'm commanding you to share freely with the poor and with other Israelites in need.

And what will it look like? I'll just touch on four or five areas very, very briefly. Firstly, our money. Well, our attitude to ourselves.

To be generous to others, I find it helps not to take myself too seriously. Yeah? Not to keep so tight a diary that I don't actually have time for the unexpected need for me to spend time with someone.

Money. I used to kind of work out what my giving would be. I'd give this for the church and I'd give that for that. And then when a need was presented before me, I had nothing left.

And so now I leave a bit of slack in that. So I can be, if I've got money, I can be generous in the moment. If I have it, I can be generous in the moment. Home.

[21 : 07] For those who have a home, whether it's a spare bed, thank you, David and Libby, for giving us the first spare bed in the central belt when we moved from Inverness. Opening up home and time for me this coming week, giving an older man some time because he's nervous about moving home.

And so I'm just going to have a coffee with him. Yeah? Yeah. To be honest, it would be a pleasure. It's not a great sacrifice. But it's just been practically generous.

Let's keep our hearts and our hands open. The Lord Jesus, he kept his hands open, didn't he? Yeah?

I'm so glad that he kept them open for me and for you. And my encouragement to us, to myself and to yourself, is let's keep our hearts and our hands open and resist the tendency to become a little bit tight-fisted in our hearts and our hands.

Let's pray. Perhaps you would like to ask God as well to keep your heart, your hands open and not to become tight-fisted in your heart. Let's pray together.

[22 : 27] Join me in prayer and then I'll hand back to Mike. Thank you, Father, that when Jesus faced the cost, he was willing.

Thank you that he kept his hands open for us. And Father, we pray that you would give us the grace to keep our hearts and our hands open to those who are in need.

And Father, if we're feeling in our own need, we pray that you would provide for us, Father. Whether that's friendship or money, whatever it is, Father, we pray to you that you would provide.

Thank you that you provided Jesus for us. Amen.