

Living the Jesus Way:

Generosity Option II



AIM

To discuss what early Christians were learning about generosity and think of ways to act generously in our everyday lives.

MEDIA/ ILLUSTRATION

Shel Silverstein's *The Giving Tree* available here: <http://youtu.be/kIYQ5vQjk6k> or available in text at this website: http://allpoetry.com/poem/8538991-The_Giving_Tree-by-Shel_Silverstein

- What does this story make you feel?
- How does it make you want to act?
- Can you see Jesus hidden in this story?
- Do you see the positive way of thinking about the gifts of the tree to the boy?

See also: -My Story by Julianne Rogers in this pack.
-The Generosity Shop: http://youtu.be/_cNfX3tJonw

INTRODUCTION

Everyone gets a slip of paper with a true case study of someone touched by Operation Santa. Read it and think about how you would feel in the same situation.

- Who would you ask for help?
- How would you solve your challenge?
- What if you had different resources than what you have now (maybe that's family, friends, a bank account)?
- Could this happen to you or someone you love?

Share a few case studies with the group and talk about the outcomes that were achieved by Operation Santa.

BODY

Paul spent a good deal of his life corresponding with the church he planted in Corinth. In this part of letter, Paul is fundraising! Paul wants to take an offering from the church in Corinth to the church in Jerusalem for two reasons; the first that the Jerusalem church has a great need (there was a famine and the Christians were starving), the second is to solidify the unity between the two churches. In other words, Paul wants to help them to remember that they are brothers and sisters in Christ and they should care for each other.

This text is a bit dense, but Paul is basically saying: Jesus was the ultimate in generosity: he had everything as God, but he was willing to give all that up, come to earth and give his life for our sake. If we believe this about Jesus, then we must respond to his great gift by being generous ourselves. And we will be rewarded for it. Paul says, 'You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity.'

DISCUSSION

- If Jesus is the ultimate in generosity, why do we need to respond?
- Can't we just receive his blessings and keep on going?

Paul sees wealth and possessions here as a positive, saying that everything we have is a gift.

- Aren't we supposed to feel guilty that we have things other people don't?
- Does it make a difference in my behaviour or attitude if I think of my resources, time, talents, etc as a gift or as something to feel guilty about?

Quote for the day: **"Generosity is one of the attributes at the very heart of the nature of God. As people made in the image of God, we grow... when we are generous. It brings out the best in us!"** -Carolyn Kitto

PRAY

'Jesus, you gave up everything you had for us: power, control, all the wealth in the universe. You came to be with us and then you gave up even your life. Thank you. We thank you, God for all the great gifts you've bestowed upon us. We know that we are custodians of those gifts and we ask your Spirit to guide us in making wise decisions about how we use those gifts for the good of ourselves and our neighbours.'

ACT

Write out what you think your gifts are: your talents, your financial gifts, your time, your possessions. Think of one thing you can do this week to be generous with each resource and then do it!

CLOSE

The Generosity Shop



Uniting Church. **Uniting Young People.**
Mission Resourcing

CASE STUDY

True-Life Stories from Operation Santa as reported by UnitingCare agencies.

The names have been changed to protect the dignity of the individuals.

- Mary's child was born premature and needed to keep warm. The expense of having the heater on all through winter was more than she could cope with financially. Mary (22) came to us for financial help but when we also offered her gifts she was overwhelmed and went away more confident that she could cope with things. A listening ear, financial assistance and food and gifts were all that were needed for Mary went away with hope instead of despair. *Salisbury*
- The Smith family has four children, one of whom was very ill. For this reason, they were having to sell the family farm. It hadn't been sold by Christmas and there was no money left for presents. Operation Santa stepped in and each child received a gift. *Naracoorte*
- Don and Susie have three young kids. Don is on work cover, with a serious back injury, reduced benefits and Susie is only able to pick up casual cleaning jobs as she is required to be fulltime carer for her husband. A food hamper and toys for children were provided as well as information and referral to services. Christmas was celebrated in this household this year and there would have been no gifts if not for Operation Santa. *Klemzig*
- Thomas, Peter, Sally and Beth (aged 13-20) were four homeless teens struggling to get a payment from Centrelink. They were accommodated by our service youth team with just the clothes on their back. We offered accommodation, vouchers, hygiene packs, presents and food hampers. They all received presents and vouchers and were so excited they couldn't wait to go to Target to use them. It's amazing how something so little could take their minds off their problems for a few hours. *Port Augusta*
- This year a very generous donor gave a gift to the value of \$300. It was very difficult to determine as to who should receive this gift. The gift tag indicated it was for a 15 year old girl. The gentleman who had given it explained that he had had a very fortunate life and wanted to give to someone that hadn't. On my list of those in need was a 15 year old girl with no siblings. Her name came from Lifeline and after speaking to them they let me know that she had a very unfortunate life. The gift fit her interests perfectly. This gift was truly a blessing meant especially for this young girl. *Mt Gambier*
- A lady asked for a Christmas hamper application on a very hot day. I later found out that she had been in a car accident earlier in the year and had lost her part-time job. She was waiting to be called into hospital for an operation on her shoulder as she has been unable to lift her arm as a result of the accident. As it was the first time she has needed assistance she was apprehensive and unsure whether she would qualify. She was afraid that she would not be able to give her children Christmas gifts which she felt they deserved. This lady is a single parent on Centrelink benefits and was in genuine need. We were able to supply gifts for the children as well as food. This lady was overwhelmed to think that someone else cared and was able to help. *Para Hills*
- Megan and her 2 children came into our centre on the last day we were distributing hampers and gifts. She was very uneasy and not comfortable asking for help. The lady discussed that she has problems with her employer who had cut her pay just before Christmas due to a work accident. She was so touched by our response to her family and her needs. We were able to supply her with a hamper and gifts for the children. The youngest child was given a soft toy to take away with her. She clung to that toy and wouldn't let it go. The young lady broke down crying and thanked everyone many times. *Salisbury*

- “Thank you so much for the lovely gifts for my children. It made our Christmas a whole lot brighter. We were not looking forward to Christmas as it seemed we would not have enough money to pay for anything, but your presents made it so that the kids could have a lovely Christmas, like all their friends. They were so excited and surprised to see their presents on Christmas Day. We all had such a fun time picking them up. Thank you for making our Christmas much happier than what it would have been” - The Jones Family (letter was sent after Christmas to say thank you). *Woodville*
- Michelle, 15 and Donovan, 16, are still at school as well as being the primary carers for their single mother who was terminally ill with breast cancer. Unfortunately their mother passed away one week before Christmas which left them both distraught. While out on a visit we took them both gift bags with presents from the Operation Santa gift trees. They were so overwhelmed that there would be people out there that would think of them at this time, as they had almost forgotten it was Christmas at all. It is this kind of social connection that can start to help them heal and to promote the relationship they have with their new care worker, where teenagers can often shut people out. *Brompton*
- We were contacted by a gentleman who this year had lost his daughter in a house fire and now he and his wife are “parents” to their 12 year old grandson. These people have never asked for assistance in their lives but this year, because of many unexpected expenses related to taking care of their grandson, and also the costs associated with their daughter's funeral, they found themselves asking for help so they could give toys to their grandson. Upon collecting the toys that had been packed for their grandson, both the gentleman and his wife broke down in tears so grateful that at least there would be wonderful toys for their grandson on Christmas Day. *Victor Harbour*
- Gifts for Mike, Steve and Will aged 10, 12 and 14 were given to a mother who is really struggling just to cope with day to day life and the rising costs associated with food, petrol and household bills that gifts for her children for Christmas were not in the budget. One of the children does not even have his own bed and she had been saving very hard to buy a bed and thus saving for this had to outlay gifts for the other children. By receiving toys and gifts from Operation Santa this year, the children did not have to miss out on having wonderful gifts for Christmas Day. *Campbelltown*
- A young 21 year old mum, Jade, and her three children had just left a violent relationship and fled with the clothes on their backs and nothing else. Undoubtedly they were very unsettled. UnitingCare was able to provide support and accommodation for the young family and gave vouchers, food and clothes also. Jade was very surprised as she was thinking she would have to return to the relationship fearing how she would provide for her children. The children said it was the best Christmas they had ever had as they don't usually get many toys or things. Jade was so happy with all the support she was given and is currently still living in the accommodation provided. She and the children are safe and happy. *Port Pirie*
- Belinda has had a tough year - she and her 4 boys (4, 6, 10, 15) have been homeless. They have moved several times, most recently to a caravan park. Belinda had no money to buy gifts for the boys for Christmas. Her Centrelink benefit barely covered the cost of rent and food. Belinda has required a lot of help this year and said she felt embarrassed asking for “something as frivolous as Christmas gifts”, but she did not want her boys to miss out - especially the younger boys who still believe in Santa. We were able to provide suitable gifts for all the boys as well as a gift for Belinda. *Kadina*

My Story: Generosity Addition and Multiplication

--Julianne Rogers, Operation Santa State Coordinator

It was Christmas of 2001 in Cleveland, Ohio. It was my first gig as a youth director at a church in an affluent neighbourhood. It was coming up on Christmas and the church always served Thanksgiving dinner at an inner-city youth centre and then handed out Christmas gifts. I decided that it would be an excellent experience if our confirmation class were to collect the presents and hand them out after serving the dinner. Each week for a month, I annoyed those kids about bringing in some presents for other youth. On the day, I packed the car up with the 48 gifts we had collected from the 20 students: it wasn't a bad haul, in my opinion especially since only 43 kids were signed up to attend the dinner and receive presents. I was pleased that only two kids had 'got it wrong' (in my opinion) and brought gifts for a baby and a middle aged woman. I wasn't sure what we were going to do with these, but since we had extras, I wasn't worried and packed them in anyway.

As we were serving Thanksgiving dinner, in that crumbling old building in a gray and lonely part of town, we were so blessed with heaping helpings of smiles and friendly conversation from kids we would have normally passed by. The atmosphere was fantastic. One 12 year old kid said, 'Man! This the best meal I ever ate!' [sic] Only trouble was, in a centre like that kids were used to dropping in. Invites aren't really their thing. We had 55 kids there that afternoon. The minister and I looked at each other with worried looks. We had a small pow-wow in the kitchen: 'What are we going to do? I couldn't bear it if some kids went away with out gifts.' As there weren't any shops within a 20 minute drive from there, we tried to think of a solution. One of the parents said, 'We could make gift vouchers and bring more gifts later.' Another parent said, 'I have two twenty dollar bills, maybe we could give those to the two 18 year olds.' We decided that, as we only had 10 minutes before the gift giving, we'd have to do both. We prayed that God's will would be done and that the kids at the end wouldn't be too hurt by not getting gifts.

There were tough kids from ages 8-18 there in their street wear, coming from and going back to circumstances I couldn't imagine. The kids lined up to leave and the minister and I played Santa. We got so caught up in the fun and excitement that when one of the 18 year old boys said, 'Dude, I don't want a gift for myself. I don't need anything. But it kills me that I can't buy my mom or my new baby brother something to give them on Christmas morning.' The minister and I locked eyes again. 'You won't believe this,' I said. 'But I think God knew you were coming tonight.' And I handed him the basket filled with brand new baby things. Tears spilled out of that tough guy's eyes and poured down his cheeks, but his eyes were shining. 'You'll never know what this means to me and how this will thrill my mom.' We are all nearly in tears then. Except for a small 13 year old guy who said, 'Hey if you have some other stuff, I'd really like to give my mom something, too. She's 45 and she deserves a nice present.' Out came the present for a middle-aged woman.

Everyone was revelling in the magic of the moment and more kids left with their presents. Finally the last kid came up very shyly and received her gift and shuffled out the door into the frosty darkness. We made to start cleaning up and suddenly it hit me! We hadn't used the gift vouchers we'd made up. I turned to the minister, 'Did you give any of those vouchers away?' 'No, I thought you did.' 'You mean that every child got a present?' 'They must have. This is the only door to get out.' All of the parents, the confirmation kids, the minister and I were speechless. 'I only had 48 presents.' 'I know, I counted them when we set them out on the table here.' 'I definitely counted 55 kids coming through the line.' 'So, we gave away more presents than we had...'

We all thanked and praised God. I still get the shivers when I tell this story, because it was the most powerful and unexplainable moment in my life.

II Corinthians 8:1-9:15 esp. 8:9-14 and 9:6-15 NRSV

(2 Corinthians 8) We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia; 2 for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. 3 For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, 4 begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints-- 5 and this, not merely as we expected; they gave themselves first to the Lord and, by the will of God, to us, 6 so that we might urge Titus that, as he had already made a beginning, so he should also complete this generous undertaking among you. 7 Now as you excel in everything--in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you --so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking. 8 I do not say this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others.

9 For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. 10 And in this matter I am giving my advice: it is appropriate for you who began last year not only to do something but even to desire to do something-- 11 now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means. 12 For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has--not according to what one does not have. 13 I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between 14 your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance.

15 As it is written, "The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little." 16 But thanks be to God who put in the heart of Titus the same eagerness for you that I myself have. 17 For he not only accepted our appeal, but since he is more eager than ever, he is going to you of his own accord. 18 With him we are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his proclaiming the good news; 19 and not only that, but he has also been appointed by the churches to travel with us while we are administering this generous undertaking for the glory of the Lord himself and to show our goodwill. 20 We intend that no one should blame us about this generous gift that we are administering, 21 for we intend to do what is right not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of others. 22 And with them we are sending our brother whom we have often tested and found eager in many matters, but who is now more eager than ever because of his great confidence in you. 23 As for Titus, he is my partner and co-worker in your service; as for our brothers, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ. 24 Therefore openly before the churches, show them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting about you.

(2 Corinthians 9) Now it is not necessary for me to write you about the ministry to the saints, 2 for I know your eagerness, which is the subject of my boasting about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year; and your zeal has stirred up most of them. 3 But I am sending the brothers in order that our boasting about you may not prove to have been empty in this case, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be; 4 otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated--to say nothing of you--in this undertaking. 5 So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you, and arrange in advance for this bountiful gift that you have promised, so that it may be ready as a voluntary gift and not as an extortion.

6 The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. 9 As it is written, "He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." 10 He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. 11 You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; 12 for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God. 13 Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others, 14 while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given you. 15 Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!