



WOW: Word Of the Week

GENEROSITY

May 24, 2023

Generosity: the quality of being generous. **Generous:** having a readiness to give more than is necessary or expected; being kind to others. **Antonym:** selfish. **Synonyms:** unselfish, liberal, lavish, magnanimous, giving, bountiful, not grudging, unsparing, indulgent, plenteous, benevolent, big-hearted, honorable, good, self-sacrificing, charitable, gracious.

Generosity is a quality to be pursued. Mothers model for us generosity. Earlier this month celebrated the grand possibilities of generosity made visible, modeled, lived out. Self-giving, self-sacrificing, supportive, encouraging. Paul wrote about the need for generosity (2 Cor. 8) and the fruit or results of generosity (2 Cor. 9). During my early years in ministry, one of my mentors was fond of saying, “Nothing makes us more like God than being generous.” But this week’s WOW is not about human generosity. This WOW focuses on our generous God. (On a brief personal note, forgive me in advance for constantly going back to Scripture. Some say I am too theological. I love to talk about how we are to live life, but our lives must be informed by who God is.)

Onward! Can grace and generosity be synonyms? Is not God’s grace the ultimate evidence of God’s generosity? New Testament grace echoes God’s Old Testament loving-kindness. Grace reveals God. Review the synonym list: unselfish, liberal, lavish, giving, unsparing, self-sacrificing, charitable (from the Greek word for grace, *charis*), gracious. Words from Scripture: God lavished his love, God gave his Son, if God did not spare his Son..., sacrifice, gracious God, God of grace.

God’s grace is beyond understanding without knowing who God is. God revealed himself because he wishes to be known as he is. If we pass over this first step, we will almost certainly misunderstand the rest of the story. God’s grace begins with God: holy, just, merciful. God will never stop being any of these. God will consistently act to be all of these.

Trying to understand God’s grace without God’s holiness will lead to license. Trying to understand God’s grace without God’s justice will lead to cheap grace. God’s loving mercy and kindness, yea, God’s grace, is mysterious, hard to grasp. Generous God graciously, gracefully, extends grace – demanding holiness, fulfilling justice.

Human generosity can be rebuffed, refused. Gifts can be returned. Gifts are not always appreciated. Some gifts require action on the part of the one receiving the gift. These truths are not hard to understand in the context of human relationships. Why do so many people struggle to understand divine generosity?

God’s generosity, yes, God’s grace, can be refused. Grace can be returned – one can turn away from God’s greatest gift. Grace is not automatically unconditional – universalism says that everyone will be saved, regardless. Nonsensical. A gift is not a gift until it is received.

Think with me. Generosity given depends on the giver, generosity received depends on the receiver.

Substituting the word “generosity” everytime the Bible says “grace” would be confusing in many biblical passages. Nonetheless, a lesson is here. Generous grace is the ultimate evidence of God’s character and nature. God will be gracious because God is God. God is faithful to himself. God is faithful to us. God will not stop being who he is. Grace depends on God’s character. Grace is evidence of God’s great desire for relationship with his human creation. Grace is not advanced by legalism, grace is not advanced by license. Grace is lived out through faith, being faithful to the generous God is faithful to us.

Generosity. What God is like. What we are called to be like. Think about it: “we are never more like God than when we are being generous.”