

ABSTRACT
OVERFLOWING GENEROSITY

by

Glenn Featherstone Douglass

This project explored the current understanding and practice of biblical generosity and abundance, as compared to charity and prosperity, within congregations of the Church of God of Prophecy in central Kentucky. This project demonstrated the linkage between the fruit of generosity and the kingdom attribute of abundance. It further established how generosity functions as a response, one that may result in still greater abundance, as distinguished from intentional charity performed with the preset goal of obtaining prosperity from a God bound by his promises.

The project arranged focus groups within three of the twelve churches located in central Kentucky. To ensure greater response, I used prompts derived from biblical understandings, regional tools and teachings, and denominational teachings and biblical stances. I also included a final question which I used to better clarify the groups initial responses.

Unexpectedly, my research revealed a joyful desire to give coupled with a preference for personal interaction, when appropriate, with the recipients of their generosity. The research uncovered a strong correlation between time-honored biblical insights and the focus group members' understanding of the various concepts. Finally, in addressing the concern whether giving hurt or helped the recipients, it uncovered an opportunity to reassure givers they could give without fear of causing harm.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled

OVERFLOWING GENEROSITY

presented by

Glenn Featherstone Douglass

has been accepted towards fulfillment

of the requirements for the

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY degree at

Asbury Theological Seminary

Mentor

Date

Internal Reader

Date

Representative, Doctor of Ministry Program

Date

Dean of the Beeson Center

Date

OVERFLOWING GENEROSITY

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of
Asbury Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by

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August 2017

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Above all, I would like to thank our Heavenly Father for the gift of salvation through his son, my Lord, Jesus Christ, and the blessing of his Holy Spirit who empowers and sustains me, never more so than through the challenges faced in completing this project. The gifts given me and the opportunities provided to share them according to his will convinced me of his purpose for this work and that to follow.

I am grateful for Asbury Theological Seminary and all the men and women who have opened my understanding of Scripture and its application in my life, allowing me to walk alongside the Holy Spirit in this journey, never more so than when this knowledge transformed into living examples. It began one very cold day twenty-two years ago in an old dorm long since torn down. There I met people who helped ensure I would never be that cold again.

My thanks to Dr. Milton Lowe, you demonstrated the patience and understanding that kept me from simply walking away from this work during a very dark and difficult struggle. My thanks to Dr. Russell West, you convinced me I would just have to heed your advice and climb the rope just as you taught others, somehow, no matter how long the climbing took. My thanks, also, to Dr. Tom Tumblin, you opened doors for me when they seemed so firmly shut everywhere I turned. His understanding of the topic and the current literature proved enormously beneficial, but I value most how he showed his appreciation for my work, even when I was less than pleased. I give so much credit to you three men for helping me find the courage to stand still, not to fight back, and to let the Holy Spirit deal with the cares of this world.

The interaction with those working for their doctorates was a great joy. I learned so much from each of you, and I thank you.

I want to thank Bishops Gary Smith and Scott Gillum. The Church of God of Prophecy has welcomed me and the gifts the Lord gave me for ministry. If I were to name any pastors, some would be left out, but you know who you are and I thank you.

I want to thank the members of Community UMC in Prestonsburg, Kentucky. I came there knowing the twenty-first century understanding of God's generosity and abundance did not follow scripture or his plans. Thank you for helping me find and understand the difference between self-centered giving and other-centered giving for that is the basis of this entire dissertation.

I want to thank my friends and family. My brother, Tommy Douglass, has much too high an opinion of my gifts, but he has always stood with me. Thanks, Tommy, for being a great brother and friend. I want to thank my amazing extended family as well. Thank you for blessing us in so many ways.

Above all, I want to thank my wife, Sheree. You are so gifted and talented. You bring the best out in people, especially those who have forgotten just how good they really can be. You gave me time and space to compile and write the song of my heart. Your generosity inspires mine. Thank you for loving me.

CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM

Introduction

Jesus came to bring life, more abundant life (John 10:10). He sought joyful obedience resulting from the complete transformation of one's heart and mind. Scripture frequently uses the Greek word μετάνοια when referencing this specific change. Johannes Louw and Eugene A. Nida further describe the use of this word:

The emphasis in μετανοέω and μετάνοια seems to be more specifically the total change, both in thought and behavior, with respect to how one should both think and act. Whether the focus is upon attitude or behavior varies somewhat in different contexts. (41.52)

John the Baptist, in Luke 3:8, demands from the people following after him a response indicating such complete and total μετάνοια, including repentance. In verse 11, his words summarize the scriptural insights leading to creation of this DMin project: "If you have two shirts, give one to the poor. If you have food, share it with those who are hungry" (NLT). Good deeds occur when Christ-like μετάνοια produces δικαιοσύνη, righteousness understood both as "the fulfillment of His will in action" and "as a pure gift from God, like everything connected with the kingdom" (Kittel and Friedrich 199). Louw and Nida describe "the act of doing what God requires" (88.13).

Paul expands on the gospel concept by incorporating the Old Testament use of δικαιοσύνης in 2 Corinthians 9:10-11 to create a powerful reciprocating image of God's abundance juxtaposed against human generosity. While verse 11 depicts generosity as an action in response to a physical blessing, verse 10 predicts the resulting increase of the products of righteousness, ἀνθήσει τὰ γενήματα τῆς δικαιοσύνης. These translations correspond effectively with the understanding of δικαιοσύνη found in the Septuagint

where the implications of the obedience which pleases God (Kittel and Friedrich 196) can be easily contrasted with the unloving sacrifices of Hosea 6:6.

Those who follow Christ testify to this change in attitude and behavior as they demonstrate compassion (1 John 3:17), mercy (Matt. 9:11), self-control (Gal. 5:22), as well as the other results of μετάνοια listed throughout the New Testament. This project demonstrates the linkage between the fruit of generosity and the kingdom attribute of abundance. It further establishes how generosity functions as a response, a response that may result in still greater abundance, to be differentiated from an intentional act of charity performed with the preset goal of obtaining prosperity from a God bound by his own promises.

The project highlights these differences by demonstrating a growing sense of surrender whenever generosity develops as a response to God's abundance. It underlines the way in which intentional charity performed with the set purpose of reward differs little from the practice of magic. The key to these distinctions will be recognizing whether the one giving seeks to manipulate God into pouring out his riches or to open the door for God to pour out greater μετάνοια.

Jesus never sugarcoated the gospel. From the first, he made clear that following him demanded commitment. In Matthew 25:31-46, he clarified any possible confusion regarding kingdom *koinonia*, by illustrating in simple narrative the first and second greatest commandments. Earlier in Matthew, he himself had proclaimed these commandments as the basis upon which depended all the law and the prophets. In Matthew 16:24, he challenged his disciples, asking them if gaining the whole world would be of lasting benefit in exchange for losing their soul.

Nevertheless, today's world orients itself toward one specific premise far too boldly for the church to ignore, even against the din of its other, secular claims. "Look after your own needs and trumpet your own successes," the world says, "because no one else will! Grab all you can, while you can!" In fact, in his bestseller, Donald Trump proudly proclaims, "The final key to the way I promote is bravado. I play to people's fantasies. People may not always think big themselves, but they can still get very excited by those who do. That's why a little hyperbole never hurts" (Trump and Schwartz 57). This project intends to prove that this viewpoint does hurt and can weaken the church's commitment to kingdom purposes.

As a result, even Christians fall victim to the overbearing weight of this greedy age's relentless boasting. Many pastors preach as though they have forgotten essential elements of Jesus' proclamation. Likewise, some churches behave as though they never heard of them. Some ministries go so far as to preach prosperity as though it established one's fitness for the kingdom of God ("Spirit and Power" 11). Whether elements of the body of Christ prefer the extreme position described by the phrase *blab it and grab it gospel* or a less confrontational one that states, *God does not want those who believe in him to be poor or to suffer*, this rhetoric echoes throughout many of our most popular churches (Jeffress 7-8). Nevertheless, God's Word has not changed.

As a pastor, I have frequently struggled with this temptation, too. The need and desire for victory in difficult situations often threatened to drown out the voice of God in my ear. However, when facing the greatest challenge of my ministry, I heard my Lord's voice plainly in my ears, saying, "Just stand still and let it wash off of you." When I heard this gentle, yet firm command, I had been removed from my charge and faced loss

of my credentials. My family's relationship with the Methodist Church had been forever changed. My ministry, as I had known it, was in ruins. Unsupported and undermined by my district superintendent, I was not even able to gain admission into this Doctor of Ministry program. More than anything, I wanted to stand up and defend myself against this grotesque injustice. Instead, my Lord repeated over and over, "Just stand still and let it wash off of you." In many ways, this paper is my response, not to the people involved since flesh and blood are never the enemy (Eph. 6:12) but to the *Sitz im Leben* surrounding this era of greed and self-promotion that threatens to overwhelm and conceal God's plan for his church.

In accepting this weakness within me, I now understand that God has never required painless sacrifices. He grounds his righteousness in loving generosity. In a fallen world, his righteousness often pinches and hurts those who sacrifice and follow his will. As long as Jesus delays his return, putting the needs of others ahead of one's own will remain difficult and uncomfortable. Still, God's people cannot know holiness while still the center of their own world (Oswalt, *Called to Be Holy* 75).

One leading member of the local church who had supported the district superintendent's actions was a genuinely godly man I will call Joshua. He always bragged on my preaching, but he told me he did not believe he could trust me to do what he himself believed God wanted me to do. We talked about this problem often and his opinion never changed. When everything fell apart, I learned Joshua had played a large role in these events. In spite of numerous opportunities to fight back against him and others, in order to be faithful to the Lord's command, I stood still and let it wash off of me.

By standing still and dealing generously with others, the situation slowly changed. It changed so greatly that even Joshua, in a very backhanded way, expressed his disappointment with the way the situation had been handled, too. Members in the community became openly supportive of and generous toward my wife and me. We no longer felt so greatly embarrassed by our situation. Then, in December 2012, one such loving friend told us that Joshua lay dying in a Lexington, Kentucky, hospital. Immediately we heard the Lord's instructions to visit John. My wife agreed; I went.

The visitation lasted mere minutes, but it transformed everything in the lives of all involved. Joshua and I reconciled. We allowed God to bring peace between us and joy into the hearts of others. We expressed our love for one another out loud, before witnesses. We prayed for one another. He allowed me to anoint him with oil as we prayed. On that day, our lives and ministries took an even greater turn toward the image of Christ.

As this issue between Joshua and my family resolved, I realized that for the first time in my life, even though in a clearly unfair and unjust situation, I had not tried to defend myself. I had not stood up for myself or for my family although we were surrounded by people who could clearly see the injustice done to us. God finally had room to create within the two of us, as well as those around us, genuine peace, peace based upon trust in him alone.

Many westernized people of the twenty-first century no longer appear to look back as they once did to the church, the body of Christ, for answers to their immediate problems (Sherkat 176). In fact, Mark A. Smith, in an interview with Joanna Piacenza for the Public Religion Research Institute, is quoted saying, "In the long run, I claim,

Christians take largely the same moral and political stances as atheists and other non-Christians” (184). In many cases, even the twenty-first century *ekklēsia* no longer expects what it once demanded of its appointed leaders. Frequent disappointments and disillusionments have lowered present expectations even though historic expressions of standards appear unchanged.

In any case, the needs of the *ekklēsia* and the surrounding world have not changed nor diminished. In a succinct summation of greed, Bryan Appleyard notes, “[T]hese young people did not identify their goals as social or political but solely as personal” (26). These worldly young people had no thought for the needs of others. Even when speaking out for others, their speech focuses on themselves. Surprisingly, many in the church now demand to know if God’s promises to provide in abundance still ring true in this present *age of greed* (“Spirit and Power” 30). Some of the church’s most active members now whine that they get nothing from their service to their churches.

Turning away from classic governmental attacks against poverty, many in the church now battle to demand and create a minimum level of family and community security, which in simplistic terms strongly resemble the *koinonia* of the early church (Daly 243). Though many no longer trust their appointed leadership, the *ekklēsia* longs to hear the truth spoken as Christ himself spoke it (Grundy 115-17). They yearn for a truth that reveals integrity and offers hope, one exposing the reality of a sin-filled world while offering the promise of God’s good news in Jesus Christ. The church hungers for a truth based in Godly righteousness—his abundance producing his generosity within his kingdom.

In Philippians 2, Paul reminds Christians that Jesus did not see equality with God as something to which he could cling when the redemption of all creation hung in the balance. Other New Testament writers also remind their readers, again and again, to consider the needs of others ahead of one's own. Self-sacrificial generosity cannot exist simultaneously with unremitting greed. Contentment, supported by an awareness of God's abundance, cannot exist without a *koinonia* in which to express grateful generosity. Worldly reciprocity implies obligations on both parties, an idea that cannot flourish long amidst a community fully aware of its utter dependence upon the God who saved them.

Jesus brought to Earth, into existence, an attitude of placing the needs of others ahead of one's own. Without comprehending Jesus' overarching vision proclaiming that the needs of others must come first, generosity will quickly degrade into self-serving, breast-beating alms-giving (Luke 18:11). Generosity quickly twists into self-aggrandizement.

Many in the church of the twenty-first century demand to know if those passages placing others first still have meaning and power in today's *age of greed*. Society both contradicts and utterly devours whole the concept of placing the needs of others first. Craig Alan Satterlee describes the unease people feel regarding the overwhelming nature of their gadgets and gismos, houses and cars all the while clinging to them even as they realized the degree to which possessing them places them in charge over their lives (44-46).

Pitted against society's uneasiness with the ubiquity of its own stuff lies the ease with which such stuff becomes more tailored to meet the increasingly specific desires

regarding those things many people genuinely believe they need. Paul Roberts describes the evolution of modern consumerism: “[O]ur preferences, attitudes, and identities have become so intertwined with the offerings of the marketplace that we have internalized many of the market’s values and reflexes” (22). Nowhere is this evolutionary conformity more striking than in the incredible importance placed on owning a razor with five blades rather than three. Consumerism is no longer focuses on the demand for certain products. Now it focuses on the specific features and imagined benefits such a product might bring.

Finally, of course, the *age of greed* generates ever-increasing greed. In spite of already possessing an unimaginable abundance of stuff, the need for even more stuff grows rather than diminishes. All the while, greed-motivated, number-driven management has destroyed the hope of a secure, stable job, resulting in “widespread feelings of economic insecurity and dissatisfaction” (Williamson 28-29). Said simply, the cost of greed has so enormously exceeded the rewards of greed that greed itself no longer seems worth the effort.

The research intends to offer insights into questions concerning the manner whereby members of the Church of God of Prophecy located in central Kentucky, experience God’s promised abundance and generosity. It will also uncover opportunity for continued research designed to determine a legitimate degree with which these results can be generalized in other areas of Kentucky and other parts of this church.

In so doing, the research provides additional insight into the current understanding held by dedicated Christians concerning the contrasts between Christian self-sacrifice and secular self-interest. By measuring actual beliefs and life experiences, pastors and leaders throughout the church of God may be encouraged to reassert these ancient truths into the

roar of today's cacophony of consumption. I hope these insights will provoke other similarly minded Christians to take a firm stand against the half-truths, untruths, and outright lies spoken as though they were a fundamental component of this current *age of greed* before this age destroys the society which created it.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to explore the current understanding and practice of biblical generosity and abundance, as compared to charity and prosperity, within congregations of the Church of God of Prophecy in central Kentucky.

Research Questions

The goal of this project was to categorize and process the biblical concept of generosity as understood by Christians today, using the sample previously described. Furthermore, it is intended to compare the sample's understanding and practice of prosperity/abundance with the stated beliefs of the Church of God of Cleveland, Tennessee, as found in its *Ministry Policy Manual* (Hamby), statements found on its Web site, and those found in Scripture. They will not begin to cover the entire gamut of documentation used to inspire the reasoning behind the pastors' and church leaders' responses, nor are they intended to do so.

Research Question #1

What is the understanding and practice of generosity in the Church of God of Prophecy in central Kentucky?

Research Question #2

What is the understanding and practice of abundance in the Church of God of Prophecy in central Kentucky?

Research Question #3

How do these understandings and practices of generosity and abundance inform the view and understanding of charity and prosperity for Christians in the Church of God of Prophecy in central Kentucky?

Definition of Terms

In this project, the word *generosity* always represents the Scripture-based intent to “look for opportunities to be good stewards, helping others” instead of themselves (Witherington, *Conflict* 427). Paul extends the concept to the placing of others’ needs ahead of one’s own, even to the extent of reducing one’s own resources below the demands of one’s own pressing needs with the phrase, “thinking of others as better than yourselves” (Phil. 2:3b). John Oswalt describes it as self-forgetful love (*Called to be Holy* 127).

The term *abundance* is used primarily as Paul used it in 2 Corinthians 9:11. Here Paul writes, “[H]e will always make you rich enough to be generous at all times” (Louw and Nida 57.29). Chapter 2 further explores abundance as defined by other scholars and historic literature since the project emphasizes human generosity in response to the abundance God provides. The connection between generosity as a one-time act and generosity as representative of evolving righteousness will be explored in the context previously noted.

The word *greed* is used to describe the desire to accumulate coupled with the refusal to share with others even when one’s own short-term needs will clearly suffer no ill effect. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck include greed under the forbidden behavior of coveting since greed includes not only the idea of holding onto things one already

possesses but also acquiring things that rightfully belong to others (250). Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown, and Nicholas Perrin highlight this insight further: “[C]ompare Mk 12:40 par. Lk 20:47 which speak dismissively of long prayers which are a cloak for greed” (623). These prayers not only demonstrate an unwillingness to share with others but reveal a determination to make off with the property of others, especially powerless widows.

The terms *charity* and *prosperity* are used to illustrate the behavior underscored by Jesus in the Markan version of the widow’s mites (12:41-44). In these verses Jesus defined the gifts of the rich as “a tiny part of their surplus” (vs. 44) and contrasted their convenient giving with the sacrificial giving of the widow. She, he said, “has given everything she had to live on” (vs. 44). This disdainful picture of convenient giving intended to benefit the giver and not the recipient is strengthened by the story of Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31 in which Lazarus is seen, “longing for scraps from the rich man’s table” (vs. 21).

These terms are used as defined:

- Generosity—the property of acting against one’s worldly best interest, viewing others’ needs ahead on one’s own or self-forgetful love,
- Abundance—the property of having enough to be generous at all times,
- Greed—the desire to accumulate, coupled with a strong aversion to share,
- Charity—the act of giving out of convenience or for self-benefit, and
- Prosperity—the property of having extreme excess beyond reasonable need.

Ministry Project

The ministry project required an exploratory study of pastors and leaders from the Church of God of Prophecy in the central Kentucky area. The goal was to obtain thirty-thirty-five participants in total. Depending on weather, the study was scheduled to take place in the Spring of 2017.

The research was entirely qualitative. It involved conducting focus groups made up from leading members of local churches led by the pastors already briefed on the proceedings to follow. The focus groups discussed guided, but open-ended, questions intended to develop insight into the understanding of biblical generosity and prosperity/abundance as well as practices either in their own lives or as observed over the course of their ministry. Once the responses were compiled, they were examined for cognitive and experiential consistency with the doctrinal and biblical teachings of the denomination at large. The protocol for the focus groups is provided in Appendix A.

Context

Religious and secular behaviors in central Kentucky are consistent with inhabitants of the Bible Belt. As such, the research predicts a comparatively higher understanding of Scripture and Christian concepts than elsewhere. Because of this consistency, measuring this region should not only provide more accurate information but also information that might serve as a bellwether for other parts of the world.

An unusual phenomenon, common to central Kentucky, can easily be identified by the phrase *mountain holiness*. I have personally experienced mountain holiness as the faith system that expects God to be quick to remove not only the benefits but also the reality of salvation from those who fall short of his standards after having initially been

saved. This belief system intermingles much of the personal holiness codes found in Mosaic Law with the promise of Jesus' death and resurrection. It quickly becomes very legalistic. Within central Kentucky, many church leaders reject the basic premises of mountain holiness, although the members of the churches themselves still show traces and remnants to a greater or lesser degree.

In one succinct sentence, the Church of God of Prophecy, located in Cleveland, Tennessee, proclaims, "In contemporary theological terms, the Church of God of Prophecy is a Protestant, Evangelical, Wesleyan holiness, Pentecostal movement that believes in man's freewill regarding salvation" ("History"). The church thus defines itself as separate from the Roman/Orthodox traditions of the church, dedicated to growing the church through confessions of faith and restoration, committed to actions of the Holy Spirit as it transforms Christians into the image of Christ, and confessed in the church's complete dependence upon the power of the Holy Spirit or the Holy Ghost, the term the denomination as whole prefers to use when describing the third person of the Trinity (Hamby).

In order to gain greater insight into the concept of biblical abundance as understood and experienced by the people and congregations within the churches of the Church of God of Prophecy within the eighteen counties identified as central Kentucky, this project convened focus groups comprised of pastors and church leaders from five congregations located within the survey area. The project involved the pastor of each church and a group of leaders chosen by the pastor. The pastors were asked to choose leaders upon whom they regularly rely when attempting to begin or maintain the ministries and missions of their churches.

Methodology

The research was entirely qualitative, featuring focus groups designed to explore the understanding and experience of local churches in central Kentucky. The design involved initial contact with the pastors of each local church in central Kentucky followed by focus groups made up from leading members of local churches and their pastors, when available. The focus groups featured the questions described previously.

An important component of the project was the request that the pastors select participants who were members the pastor would rely on the assist with important church ministries. I decided to use these members additional experience and maturity as assets to the research when crafting the protocol. While these particular members might not perfectly mirror the demographics of their congregations, they would represent the leadership responsible for discipling new members into the local church body.

Participants

I communicated with each of the three pastors, asking them to select a focus group of faithful laypersons who would be both knowledgeable and experienced in matters of generosity, charity, abundance, and prosperity. The pastors were asked to select participants who demonstrate spiritual maturity within their congregations and who actively help support and maintain the work of the church. As noted, they were also tenured members who have demonstrated a long-term commitment to their faith and congregation.

Instrumentation

The research was conducted using an exploratory study, featuring a semi-structured interview protocol for research with the focus groups (see Appendix A).

Variables

The research examined the understanding and practice of generosity, abundance, and prosperity.

Data Collection

The project collected data at each local church. Arrangements were made with each pastor to set aside a time to discuss with the pastor the overall aim and direction of the research. Without divulging specifics, the briefing's goal was to share with the pastor the overall intent of the research.

Anticipating meeting with the focus group immediately after the briefing with the pastor, the research naturally segued to the focus group. With the focus groups, the research attempted to draw out a combination of both personal stories and theological reasoning. At first, those selected to be in the focus group were asked to discuss their understanding of four concepts, generosity, abundance, and prosperity. These first questions were designed to encourage the members to offer more theologically based answers and discussions.

The last question attempted to obtain information based on practice and experience, focusing more on what the participants have seen than on what they believe. This segment of the discussion intended to determine whether their experiences have been positive, negative, or mixed. This segment enabled me to look more closely for any sense of entitlement or fairness/unfairness in response to the participants' giving.

Data Analysis

The results from the focus group were categorized for consistency with the guidelines derived from the literature review. Anticipating a heavy use of Scripture in

support of each participants' beliefs, those Scriptures cited by the participants were simply checked off against the interpretations of Scripture cited by others within the focus groups. A key component of the research were the measures used to determine to what degree the participants shows internal consistency between the Scriptures and paradigms verbalized and the stories and experiences shared.

Then the results from the focus groups were analyzed to determine the extent to which the focus groups (a) used Scripture as a basis of discussion, (b) used personal experience, (c) used experiences of others as illustrative, and (d) maintained consistency. After both segments of the research received initial analysis, they were then measured against one another based on three primary areas. First, the pastor's response was analyzed in terms of the response from his church's focus group and the two will be examined for consistency. Second, areas of consistency and inconsistency were determined and highlighted for further analysis. Finally, this analysis was used to determine areas in which the focus group indicates different degrees of reliance upon Scripture or experience and whether the study indicates significantly different approaches to or understandings of the interplay between generosity and prosperity/abundance.

Generalizability

Although this research will be applicable to other churches within the Church of God of Prophecy, extending it beyond the denomination will require additional work, comparing other denominational standards in use in areas where the research might be generalized.

Theological Foundation

Scripture constantly refers to the concept of generosity from a perspective of acting beyond one's own self-interest. Included in these passages are prominent messages of hope for the building of a community that practices generosity toward its members (2 Cor. 9:11-12) for an improved enjoyment of life in this world (Luke 6:46-49) and for salvation and the time of shalom, great peace and joy, in New Jerusalem when Christ Jesus returns (Rev. 21:24-26).

This section examines the passage in 2 Corinthians first since it offers an overarching understanding of God's will, which shall be further developed here and in Chapter 2.

In 2 Corinthians 9:10–15, Paul encourages the Corinthian church by writing:

For God is the one who provides seed for the farmer and then bread to eat. In the same way, he will provide and increase your resources and then produce a great harvest of generosity [δικαιοσύνης] in you.

Yes, you will be enriched in every way so that you can always be generous. And when we take your gifts to those who need them, they will thank God. So two good things will result from this ministry of giving—the needs of the believers in Jerusalem will be met, and they will joyfully express their thanks to God.

As a result of your ministry, they will give glory to God. For your generosity to them and to all believers will prove that you are obedient to the Good News of Christ. And they will pray for you with deep affection because of the overflowing grace God has given to you. Thank God for this gift too wonderful for words! (NLT)

Amplifying and expanding an understanding of almsgiving, Ben Witherington, III writes, “These chapters suggest that what is most revealing about people is what they do with surplus income, whether they spend it mostly on themselves or look for opportunities to be good stewards, helping others” (*Conflict* 427). His insight refutes the idea that stewardship consists of use resulting in the increase of the materials over which the

steward has received oversight. Instead, Witherington shows how righteous stewardship results in God gaining glory and in God meeting the needs of some of his children through the obedience of others of his children. Righteousness, then, demonstrates the actions of God within those who trust him.

As noted, Kittel and Friedrich define the Greek word δικαιοσύνης most commonly understood as *righteousness*, more richly:

In 2 C. 9:9 f., where we twice have δικαιοσύνη in a quotation from the OT (ψ 111:9; Hos. 10:12), the context, which deals with the collection, might well suggest the sense of almsgiving. It is more likely, however, that after the earlier reference to “every good work,” what is meant is right conduct worked out in acts of love, (210)

I propose a greater connection between Paul’s usage of δικαιοσύνη and the word *generosity*, which would indicate almsgiving should be specifically included when exploring the significance of δικαιοσύνη in 2 Corinthians 9:8-12.

Irrespective of any specific insights into the meaning of the word δικαιοσύνη, here are some examples of how “τὰ γενήματα τῆς δικαιοσύνης ὑμῶν” in 2 Corinthians 9:10 is translated in Bibles commonly used today:

NLT—“a great harvest of generosity in you”;

NRSV—“the harvest of your righteousness”;

GNB—“a rich harvest from your generosity”;

CEV—“what you have, so that you can give even more to those in need”;

KJV—“the fruits of your righteousness”; and,

ANT—“the fruits of your righteousness [which manifests itself in active goodness, kindness, and charity].”

Δικαιοσύνης , then, relates not only to state but also to the response. The word cannot be understood merely as a status attained. Its understanding must also include the fruits consequent to the character that results from its attainment.

Jesus left no doubt he viewed generosity and the sacrificial giving that transcends one's self-interest as crucial elements in righteous obedience. His interpretation, in Luke 10:25-37, of the first and second Great Commandments, followed by the example of the Good Samaritan, demonstrates his position. The Samaritan, at personal risk to his own life, sacrificed the time needed to care for the Jewish man in the very same place the man had earlier been attacked. Not only that, the Samaritan then took the Jewish man to an inn, watched over him during the night, then ensured his future care by sacrificing his own funds to pay the innkeeper in advance (Johnson 175). Added to Jesus' teachings on sacrificial giving, as illustrated in the parable of the widow's mite in Luke 21:3-4, Jesus' view of generosity becomes unquestionably clear.

The religious leaders had "no elasticity of spiritual comprehension which could make them respond to a power that had not already been included in the precedents they knew" (*New Interpreter's Bible* 112-13). They literally wrapped themselves up in ritual. Even though a man's withered hand was healed on the Sabbath, their attitude toward God led them to believe God would be offended by that healing (Luke 6:7).

By Luke 6:46-49, the meaning of Jesus' comment, "what I say," has become abundantly clear. He was condemning ritualized righteousness in favor of righteousness which flows from "the treasury of a good heart" (Luke 6:45). Jesus demonstrated righteousness equated directly with the generosity shown others. His willingness to show his love for the man with the withered hand in Luke 6:6-10 shows his understanding of

the kingdom and its commandments and “places high valuation on human life and needs, as well as on the ability to respond flexibly and freely to both” (Johnson 104). Jesus obeyed the intended purpose of the Sabbath, not the misunderstood purpose which would value ritual over the genuine needs of others.

Scripture defines righteousness in many ways. Louw and Nida offer these insights:

- 88.12 δίκαιος, α, ον: pertaining to being in accordance with what God requires—“righteous, just.”
- 88.13 δικαιοσύνη, ης f: the act of doing what God requires—“righteousness, doing what God requires, doing what is right.”
- 88.14 δικαίωμα, τος n: an act which is in accordance with what God requires—“righteous act.”
- 88.17 εὐθύς, εἶα, ύ: pertaining to being just and right—“just, right, upright.”
- 88.19 εὐθύτης, ητος f: the quality of uprightness—“righteousness, righteous, uprightness.” (743-44)

These qualities each represent “the treasury of a good heart” (Luke 6:45) specified by Jesus as a requirement and a result that both precedes and follows obedience to his commands, the building of one’s house on rock. Righteousness requires putting the needs of others on the same, if not higher, level than one’s own.

In spite of the reality of tangible, physical loss, Paul desperately wanted the Church to follow the example Jesus set and offer themselves as living sacrifices to God (Rom. 12:1), generosity resulting from *μετάνοια* transformation. Like Peter in 1 Peter 2:5, Paul believed such fruits demonstrate the righteousness growing within them. Such fruits, Paul knew, would glorify God by demonstrating the renewal occurring within the Christian no matter the struggle taking place without (2 Cor. 4:16-18).

From its beginning, then, the *ekklēsia* of Christ has been challenged to maintain its distinctive identity without falling victim to the temptation of separating itself entirely

from the world. Satan understood from the very first Easter the totality of his defeat. He knows he cannot defeat the resurrected Messiah, forcing him to focus on crippling the *ekklēsia*. Satan understands an *ekklēsia* that rejects interaction with the world loses the opportunity to bear fruit in the world. Therefore, Jesus prayed in their very presence for God to protect them from the “evil one” even as he sent them out into the world (John 17:13-20).

John MacArthur writes, “The true gospel is a call to self-denial. It is not a call to self-fulfillment” (2). The one who will follow Jesus must understand that the righteousness of God, δικαιοσύνης, produces little persuasive witness or testimony until Christ-followers realize the importance of placing the needs of others ahead of their own. Of course, this truth begs the question, “Since life in the kingdom demands a cross for every saint, why does much of the modern church preach only rest and peace?” This question and others are addressed in this project and in planned future projects.

The underlying Scripture upon which this project rested is 2 Corinthians 9:9-11. Much of the paper depends upon the insight the New Living Translation provided in using “generosity” instead of “righteousness” to translate δικαιοσύνης in 2 Cor. 9:10c, as *generosity*. They even used an asterisk to highlight this difference. The NLT translators differed from more literal translations such as the KJV, ASV, RSV, NRSV, and NIV. The translators of those versions use the word *righteousness* instead.

Chapter 2, then, demonstrates how both the Old Testament and the New Testament support the following claim: Righteousness that springs forth from the heart of those who love God becomes conformed to God’s own display of righteousness just as righteousness which springs forth from the hearts of those who love God demonstrates

itself in a determination to bless others as God has blessed those whose hearts he has transformed. I depended very much upon the connection between δικαιοσύνης and God's own righteousness in designing this project.

To a lesser extent, I relied heavily upon Philippians 2:1-18, with an emphasis upon verses 3-4. I included insights from Philippians 2:19-4 as well. The chain of understanding leading from righteousness to generosity to self-sacrifice depends at every point of connection in the self-image displayed by God in his son, Jesus Christ. Jesus taught righteous generosity demanded complete self-sacrifice, both in becoming human and in dying to offer salvation to creation. The literature review highlights numerous examples of God's revelation to his creation in self-sacrificial and unmerited generosity toward humanity. I explored the understandings and experiences of the central Kentucky churches of the Church of God of Prophecy as those understanding and experiences pertain to the areas of generosity, abundance, and their consequences or blessings.

Overview

Chapter 2 establishes the foundational literature review contrasting overflowing generosity against secular self-advancement as seen in both theological and secular research and literature. Chapter 3 presents the methodology used in the project. Chapter 4 reports the finding from the study. Chapter 5 offers the analysis of data and provides further discussion of the study as a whole.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE

Introduction

Scripture portrays generosity as the primary foundation upon which God rested the abundance of his kingdom. This relationship appears in writings as early as the Torah and continues in Scripture and literature still subject to critical commentary today (Vo 182). This concept spans the entire period of God's self-revelation throughout the unfolding of his kingdom. Generosity first appears in Genesis 1-3 in the act of creation itself, intensifies in the precise delineation of sin alongside the establishment of the nation of Israel (Deut. 24:19-22), climaxes with Jesus' once-and-for-all-time sacrifice on the cross (Heb. 9:12), and becomes full and complete with the descent of New Jerusalem and the fullness of Jesus' eternal reign (Rev. 21:6).

In the beginning, God created humanity in his image (Gen. 1:27). From Adam's first breath, God intended to enjoy creation alongside humanity conformed to his glorious image as fully revealed in Jesus Christ (Phil. 3:21). God created a garden in Eden where humanity might love and worship him while they together enjoyed the abundant world he made for them. Genesis 2:8-9 declares God filled the garden with "all sorts of trees [that grew] up from the ground—trees that were beautiful and that produced delicious fruit." God filled the garden with all kinds of livestock, birds, and wild animals (vs. 19) and even created a partner for Adam and named her Eve in order to imprint a balanced creation with his image. God intended for humanity "to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Mic. 6:8), to be conformed to God's image and live

alongside him. Instead, humanity chose pride over obedience and rebelled against the one who offered them the greatest love and security they might possibly know.

In spite of humanity's prideful rebellion, Scripture makes abundantly clear that God had not and would not turn his back on his creation. God continued to interact with humanity, witnessing the good acts (Gen. 5:21-24), the sinful acts (11:1-9), and those acts that were so sinful they could not be overlooked any longer (6:3). Nevertheless, even the flood proved insufficient to wash humanity's prideful rebellion away. In time, God called Abram, through his father, Terah, out of Ur and into Haran (11:31-32). Still, Haran was not the place to which God had called Abram, for Abram was called to found a great nation, one through which God would bless all the peoples of earth, breathing new life, reinvigorating his plan to reveal himself to the world through the nation of Israel (Gen. 12:1-3). As always, God's interactions with his creation started with people. Beginning with people meant he would pour out great blessings on Abram, bestowing his generosity upon the one called to work alongside God to achieve his plan (Gen. 12:1-3).

As the nation continued to grow, first through Isaac and his son Jacob, then through Jacob and his descendants, God consistently revealed himself through his people, but to take Paul's insight somewhat out of context, sadly his revelation could only be understood as δι' ἐσώπτρου ἐν αἰνίγματι or as viewed through a distorted lens (1 Cor. 13:12). Regrettably, Scripture offers only glimpses of God's generosity reflected into creation through the lives of his chosen people. God remained generous to his children, yet their generosity echoed with less than lucid clarity towards others—all the more so when compared with God's initial generosity toward them.

Nonetheless, Abram could show astonishing generosity, offering Lot the option of choosing the lands he preferred to inhabit (Gen. 13:9). In response, God unveiled far greater generosity, for as soon as Lot left their sight, he offered Abram vastly more:

Look as far as you can see in every direction—north and south, east and west. I am giving all this land, as far as you can see, to you and your descendants as a permanent possession. And I will give you so many descendants that, like the dust of the earth, they cannot be counted! Go and walk through the land in every direction, for I am giving it to you. (Gen. 13:14-17)

After defeating Kedorlaomer, Abram, in response, did share 10 percent of his spoils with Melchizedek and he did indeed return to the King of Sodom everything the king owned except for the food Abram's warriors had already eaten (Gen. 14:17-24). If Melchizedek, the founder of Jerusalem and the one who first built a Temple there, was the first to act as priest toward God, as Moishe Reiss notes both Josephus and Philo believed, then Abram's actions would certainly demonstrate a gratitude-filled response to God's generosity in providing Abram his victory (265). Within the context described, Abram's intent to glorify God explains fully his flat refusal to allow the King of Sodom to claim any credit for Abram's future abundance should Abram have not returned to him the entirety of the battle's plunder. Abram intended to allow no one to share in the glory rightfully due God for the generosity he showed Abram,

Nevertheless, for Abram, maintaining complete trust in God's promise of unimaginable future abundance waxed and waned throughout their relationship. In Genesis 15 alone, verse 6 cites Abram's trust counting to him as righteousness while verse 8 records him asking, "How can I be sure?" The chapter then ends with God establishing his covenant promise describing the vastness of the inheritance coming to Abram and his descendants.

Genesis is filled with proof of strong faith and trust, followed almost immediately with evidence of lessened trust, even attempts to take the covenant from God's hands into human hands—Ishmael being only the most obvious example. Again God confirms his covenant by renewing his promise and changing Abram's name to Abraham and Sarai's name to Sarah (Gen. 17:5, 15). Still, since Abraham laughed inside himself, so God named the promised son Isaac, which means laughter (vs. 17). Later, Sarah laughed as well when the three men stopped on their way to Sodom and made the same promise about a son to come in less than a year (Gen. 18:10). They believed God, even though they thought the promise ridiculous.

Nevertheless, after these same men left to enter Sodom, the one who promised to come back in a year to see their son, the one who was the Lord, explained to Abraham his plan to see for himself whether Sodom was as wicked as described (Gen. 18:23). In spite of all that had taken place with both Abraham and Sarah laughing at the Lord's promise, Abraham still had sufficient confidence in his relationship with the Lord to bargain with him about Sodom's final fate and the exact number of righteous men needed to avert its destruction.

This confidence is followed by Abraham's failure with Abimelech, the joy of Isaac's birth, and the expulsion of Ishmael (Gen. 20; 21). Abraham and Sarah, Sodom and Gomorrah, Isaac and Ishmael, Abimelech—the pattern continues. Abraham and his family danced a few steps forward only to stumble a few more back.

Finally, God asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac as proof of his faith in God. The very next day, without delay, Abraham sets out to follow God's instructions, demonstrating his understanding of the relationship between trust, love, faith, and

obedience while foreshadowing the ultimate in sacrificial generosity yet to come with this giving of Abraham's son at the behest of God. After God intervened and spared Isaac's life, God again recommitted to his covenant, promising Abraham, "And through your descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed—all because you have obeyed me" (Gen. 22:18). Genesis records the rest of Abraham and Sarah's life as peaceful, surrounded by family. Genesis 24:1 says the Lord had generously blessed Abraham in every way.

Isaac and Jacob demonstrated a similar pattern of greater trust followed by lesser trust throughout their lives as well. In the process of selecting Rebekah as Isaac's wife, the servant proclaims God's love and blessings shown to Abraham (Gen. 24:14). Then later, when Jacob bought Esau's birthright, Rebekah showed preference to Jacob over Esau. Even though her partiality appears to have been in accord with God's will, after all they did struggle in the womb (25:22), nothing in the story implies that either Jacob or Rebekah were responding in trust to God's will (25:23). Scripture nevertheless makes plain that God's generosity toward all three is clearly displayed in the blessing bestowed upon each one.

Scripture then moves on to the story of Isaac and Abimelech, King of the Philistines. Even though Isaac deceived the king in fear for his life, lacking sufficient trust in God to be honest with someone whom he trusted not at all, God blessed him that very year with his harvest (Gen. 26:7, 12). Nowhere is the idea of generosity mentioned and lack of trust certainly overshadowed even a hypothetical presence. However, in Genesis 26:23-25, God renewed his Abrahamic covenant with Abraham's son, Isaac, in

spite of the way in which he, Isaac, dealt with others. God demonstrates extravagantly faithful generosity, indeed.

In Genesis 27, the Bible transitions to Jacob's very heart and his relationship with others, including members of his family. Far from generous, in the beginning Jacob was greedy and grasping, taking from his brother Esau things that rightly belonged only to the firstborn son. By the time Rebekah and Jacob finished deceiving Isaac and Esau, greed and betrayal transformed into murderous rage and defiance (27:41). Rebekah then warned Jacob to flee to her brother, Laban, in order to be safe from Esau. Even Isaac, aware of the Jacob's trickery, similarly encouraged Jacob to flee and blessed him yet again (28:3-4). Isaac clearly loved Jacob, no matter the righteousness or generosity of his actions.

At this point, the connections between generosity and abundance were evident almost entirely on the side of God's generosity to the progeny of Abraham. Rebekah and Jacob practiced deceit against husband and father, son and brother. Esau schemed to follow in Cain's footsteps and murder his own brother for receiving the greater blessing. Sadly, the one in place to get the greatest reward from all this treachery had to flee to another land, to his mother's family for safety. The image of God as presented by Abraham's family had become badly splintered indeed.

In spite of the patriarchs' weaknesses, God remained faithful to Abraham's children, blessing them in spite of themselves. Jacob took prominence by pretext and then fled the consequences. In love, even as Jacob fled from his faults and weaknesses, God still blessed Jacob with a vision, which included the very same blessing he first gave Abraham and added to that blessing a promise of his protection over Jacob wherever Jacob might be. Jacob then responded with a covenant toward God that he would give

God one-tenth of all God gave him if, of course, he managed to get back home without someone else killing him first. In other words, even in the midst of God's glory, Jacob ensured that God had to fulfill his end of the bargain before Jacob had to fulfill his. He danced a little forward only to stumble a few steps back.

Of course, Jacob did well in Laban's country. He managed to marry both Laban's daughters, Leah and Rachel, although the first, Leah, required Laban to trick Jacob much as Jacob tricked Esau, copying the patterns established by the patriarchs. Jacob had many children, including twelve sons, among them one named Joseph, Rachel's eldest and Jacob's favorite. At this point in the revelation, the question must be considered whether any member of this family ever remembered, much less learned from, the past.

When Jacob had stayed long enough to pay Laban fully for his daughters, he decided to leave and return home. Laban and Jacob both had grown very wealthy while Jacob tended Laban's flocks. They agreed to split the herds so Jacob could leave on peaceful terms.

Laban first tried to cheat Jacob by altering the natural way the herd would produce offspring, but, in response, Jacob determined a better way to arrange things in his favor. Neither Jacob nor Laban acted generously toward each other, yet because of God's loving generosity, he did not turn his back on Jacob. God blessed him anyway and all those with him.

This pattern continued. For the purposes of this project, the goal was to show that the connection between generosity toward others and the blessing of God's abundance did not always follow proportionately and even contradicted reason. The point will be

crucial later in the review. James 1:22-25 warns his reader to put their understandings into action. Abraham's children struggled for generations to do so.

Then, as the revelation moved back to lands God promised Abraham, a denouement soon came into view. Jacob came home lamed and renamed Israel, the one who fought with everyone, even with God, and still came out ahead. Abraham's children were not yet a nation, but events combined together in order that they might coalesce into one. Once Jacob had made peace with Esau and arrived safely home in Canaan, events developed that, after the passage of almost five hundred years, deepened the connection between the blessings and abundance of God and the generosity and love of his children.

Jacob's time in Canaan was filled with treachery and deceit. His sons chose to slaughter an entire village rather than forgive and accept the repentance of the one who had raped their sister, lying to the leaders of the village in order to put them in a weakened state and make them easier to kill. God, nevertheless, came and offered Jacob the same covenant sworn to him earlier, the same covenant sworn to both Abraham and Isaac. One significant point to be recognized in this story is God's great love and his fierce determination to redeem the ones he loves in spite of the lack of generosity toward others displayed by the very ones God himself blessed.

Only in the life of Joseph can the readers begin to see the connection between generosity and abundance that had in others been so well hidden. Joseph was trapped, imprisoned, and finally sold into captivity in Potiphar's house. His behavior in Potiphar's house finally revealed the threads of connection as they were exposed by Joseph's faith and trust in God.

Potiphar quickly recognized Joseph's talents and rewarded him with the charge of his household. Though tempted by Potiphar's wife, Joseph remained pure. Instead of rewarding Joseph for fleeing from his wife, Potiphar believed his wife and immediately had him thrown into prison. In spite of Joseph's imprisonment, the warden recognized Joseph's gifts and quickly rewarded him with supervision over all the other prisoners and even the business of the prison itself.

While in prison, Joseph interpreted dreams for two other prisoners: the chief baker and the chief cupbearer. When the chief cupbearer was restored to his position after Joseph interpreted his dream, he forgot about Joseph for two years. Joseph did well for himself during that time, but his material reward was still bound by the walls of a prison.

Eventually, when the Pharaoh himself needed a dream interpreted, the chief cupbearer remembered Joseph. Joseph came and interpreted the Pharaoh's dreams, predicting first seven years of great abundance followed by seven years of terrible famine (Gen. 41:29-30). The Pharaoh gave Joseph the authority needed to spare the land the consequences of the famine by storing up the incredible harvest that preceded it.

The pattern continued. Israel's sons finally came to Egypt seeking grain to keep their family alive. After a time, Joseph revealed himself to them and brought his father, Israel, and the entire clan to Egypt to live. Even though the brothers had understood their temporary hardship as punishment for mistreating Joseph, they did not yet seem to connect God's later blessing with the manner, generosity versus greediness, they exhibited most often in their treatment of others around them (Gen. 42:21).

Later, Joseph recognized God's provision in sending him ahead to Egypt (Gen. 45:7), indicating that Joseph's trust in God continued to set the pattern among the

children of Israel. Only then, after all of Israel's family gathered in Egypt at Pharaoh's invitation, were they blessed by God to follow the path toward one great nation, one able to reflect God's glory as testimony of his love for all people. (Gen. 45:18; 46:3). The path proved to be a very difficult one to follow because a Pharaoh arose "who knew nothing about Joseph or what he had done" (Exod. 1:8, NLT).

This simple phrase explains what happened to the children of Israel. They had long sheltered under Abraham's covenant with God. They lived as though swimming in a sea of very simple innocence, one that did not so clearly distinguish them from the nations surrounding them. Their ease in living alongside people who had no relationship with God even enabled them to become powerful and fill the land of Egypt. They mingled so easily with the Egyptians that they enjoyed complete freedom from racial stigmatization until that Pharaoh previously mentioned came to power in Egypt.

Scripture says, "The LORD began to bless Potiphar's household for Joseph's sake" and "The LORD was with him and caused everything he did to succeed" (Gen. 39:5b, 23c). It also states, "It was God who sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives" (45:5b). Psalm 105:16-25 summarizes the story of Joseph in Egypt with this comment in verse 18-19: "They bruised his feet with fetters and placed his neck in an iron collar. Until the time came to fulfill his dreams, the LORD tested Joseph's character." Phillip McMillion points out how verses 16-22 demonstrate that Joseph came to Egypt to satisfy God's purposes (175). In that the Exodus, coupled with the return to the Promised Land, immediately follows the story of Joseph, Joseph himself functioned as a pivot around which God reset his relationship with Abraham's seed and addressed the specifics of sin.

Here, Scripture begins a story that transforms the relationship between God and the people he has chosen to use as he reveals himself to the entire world. The nature of the changed relationship involved a deeper, more precise definition of God's expectations of the nation of Israel and the results they might expect as they attained or as they fell short of those expectations. It involved a very precise definition of sin and its worldly consequences.

Theological Foundation

After describing the dilemma created by the consistent failures of the patriarchs, God established a standard, beginning with the Ten Commandments, that would evolve until those rabbis both immediately preceding and contemporaneous with Jesus could begin to codify Leviticus 19 so that provisions made for farmers could equally apply to those dwelling in cities. Jesus' teachings compare closely with those codified by the rabbis, which are cited by many scholars as possible sources used by Jesus when creating his own interpretations of life in the kingdom of God. As Paul stated in Galatians 3:24, the law served an important role as guardian until Christ came.

Moses, the Ten Commandments, and Sin

In life, when starting over, one may be able to reuse those things created in earlier attempts, but unless one's first attempt was delayed for reasons other than its success or failure, starting over, when hoping for a different outcome, requires laying a new foundation upon new axiomatic bedrock. Similar efforts yield similar results. God wanted a different outcome, so he did not choose simply to pick up again with the children of Abraham. He chose to start all over in order for them to reflect more accurately his glory, mercy, and love.

The pain of childbirth results from humanity's damaged relationship with God (Gen. 3:16). The Hebrew slaves in Egypt needed to be reborn so they might become the nation of Israel. Doing so was incredibly painful and required a complete change of heart and deed in order to reflect in its fullness the image of God to the world outside the nation of Israel (Oswalt, *What Is Holiness*).

In order to understand God's plan completely, a brief look into that which is *not* God's plan proved necessary. God never intended for sin to corrupt his plan, but change of heart did prove necessary after Adam and Eve fell short of the mark in the garden. Louw and Nida demonstrate how both a person's thought and deeds matter when God transforms hearts in their description of the word *μετάνοια* (41:52).

God's original methodology focused on Abraham's, Isaac's, and Jacob's hearts, how they perceived their relationship with God and experienced his generosity and love. Of the patriarchs, none so modified their behavior as to demonstrate a consistent witness. In fact, finding significant awareness on the part of any of the patriarchs that would demonstrate a realization that lying, deceit, betrayal, or greed are behaviors unacceptable to God would be very difficult to find. The difference between these men and the surrounding culture, at least as that difference relates to lying, deceit, betrayal, or greed, did not appear to alter their behaviors from the surrounding culture to any discernable degree.

As previously noted, lying and deceit, betrayal, and greed, as well as an overall tone of self-centeredness characterized the witness given by the patriarchs and their families. Of the primary protagonists involved in establishing covenants with God, only Joseph, one who was not a patriarch nor whose descendants ever took center stage,

appears to have experienced the change of heart, which then showed itself as changed behavior toward others. No doubt Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob trusted God to provide and care for them. The question now is how they imagined God would bless others and whether or not they should be involved in that blessing. They only infrequently shared the benefits of God's love and consequent blessings with those around them. When they finally did, they fully enjoyed the moment, making the most of it. The spotlight shone on them in these situations as much or more than it shone on God. Even while interacting with family members, much less with those not of the covenant, generosity rarely appears as anything other than grandiose display, certainly not as a part of their daily lives and dealings.

This insight enables a much clearer view of sin from God's perspective. Two of the Greek verbs for sin, ἁμαρτάνω and ἁμαρτία, involve "every departure fr. the way of righteousness, both human and divine" (Arndt and Gingrich 43) or "to act contrary to the will and law of God" (Louw and Nida 88.289). In fact, the definitions for sin offered by the authors Louw and Nida and William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich could easily be summed as specific forms of falling away or falling short of the will of God as might be used in any particular set of circumstances, properly declined or conjugated. These nuances are crucial when comprehensively addressing detailed insights into specific Scriptures as they relate to each form in question, but these nuances do not add anything significant to either the beginning disciple's or the skilled scholar's basic understanding of sin and why it necessitated God's allowing certain horrific events to occur, events that yet remain difficult to reconcile with his reputation, events God chose not to bypass in

order to use these events to prepare Israel and the rest of the world for his final solution through his Son.

For example, the Greek noun ἀμάρτημα describes the deed that results from acting contrary to the will of God (Louw and Nida 88.290; Arndt and Gingrich 43). The word ἁμαρτία may also describe the consequences, within both the moral and physical realms of God's kingdom, of acting contrary to the will of God (Louw and Nida 88.310; Arndt and Gingrich 43). Louw and Nida further note that this usage addressing sin's consequences often requires elaboration or gloss to be fully understood since the forgiveness of sin removes its moral consequences but rarely erases the actual event itself or its resulting impact on others. Arndt and Gingrich ignore the question of action versus shame entirely. Conveying to others whether the author intended to demonstrate God's power to heal in such a manner as to make past pain no longer consequential or in such a manner to remove past pain entirely is crucial to relating to other people's pain when living lovingly and generously among them.

Understanding the two words πρόσκομμα and προσκοπή often requires elaboration, too. They may be contrasted against ζκανδαλίζω, which means "to cause to stumble," in the sense of deliberate and intentional, "with the probable implication of providing some special circumstances which contribute to such behavior—"To cause to sin"" in order to understand the difference better (Louw and Nida 88.304). In support, Louw and Nida cite Matthew 5:29 to stress the idea of the eye as the apostrophe Jesus blames for deliberately and intentionally causing sin. Πρόσκομμα and προσκοπή, in contrast, relate more to unintended consequences than intentional schemes (88.307). Louw and Nida cite 1 Corinthians 8:9—"But you must be careful so that your freedom

does not cause others with a weaker conscience to stumble,” and 2 Corinthians 6:3—”We live in such a way that no one will stumble because of us, and no one will find fault with our ministry,” providing additional elaboration by including προσκοπή (22.14) and προσκοπή (25.183) as warnings to be careful lest unthinking ones fool themselves into sin.

In contrast, Louw and Nida translate some of the Greek very simply. For example, ῥαδιουργία and ῥαδιούργημα translate as “to violate moral principles by acting in an unscrupulous manner—’wrongdoing, unscrupulousness’” or to cheat (88.301). Arndt and Gingrich instead note that ῥαδιούργημα may imply more of a prank or roguish behavior, and they use frivolity in defining ῥαδιουργία (733). Their insight intensifies an understanding of both words as serious misdeeds and even fraud. The distinctions in Arndt and Gingrich do not appear as strong as those in Louw and Nida.

The passages cited by Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Biggs to define the usage of the Hebrew word נָפַח and its dependent forms offer a range of meanings from the *terrible sin* committed by the tribes of Israel in making for themselves a golden calf in Exodus 32:31 to the sin of the ones who fail to find God as wisdom personified and thus injure themselves in Proverbs 8:36. Still, the Arabic definitions “do wrong, commit a mistake or an error; II. make to miss the mark; IV. miss the mark, miss the way” (306) not only capture the essence of unintended sin, but place first the concept of simply *doing* the wrong thing regardless of motivation. The Arabic insights demonstrate that even God exposed the Tribes of Israel to the precipice of believing oneself special and above all others in order to let them experience the pitfalls of false expectations and the reality of life when expectations fail to appear.

Both include חַטָּאת and פְּשָׁעָה , words that encompass great sin, either still active and unforgiven, still spoiling all the sinner might do (Ps. 109:7), or sin forgiven whose consequences are cast away (Ps. 32:1). Sin, as understood in Old Testament Hebrew or New Testament Greek, occurs either accidentally and unforeseen or rebelliously and with malice aforethought. While later Rabbinic thought made dramatic distinctions between the effect of intentional and unintentional sin in their use of *karet* and their attempts to understand God's will for those who violate his law, God set clear boundaries for the Children of Israel who would live in the land he promised Abraham. Further, by giving the Israelites the clear delineation between sin and not sin, or genuine deeds of righteousness, God brought to an end the idea of sin as mere errors to be understood and avoided on an individual basis and demanded they learn to appreciate the significance of their deeds, good and bad, and their serious impact on others (Steinmetz 145).

Sin, then, is delusion. Sin occurs when a person or persons imagine the responsibility of relationship falls only on the other people, or on God, and not on themselves. The adding to or taking away from covenants so clearly put forward quickly leads to such delusion as allowed Jacob's children to become slaves first to an ungrateful Pharaoh and later as captives in Babylon. Because even Abraham could not fully understand the entirety of the μετάνοια God intended for his children, Jacob, Joseph, and the nation of Israel had to learn that their God held them accountable for their deeds and not just their thoughts.

Paul explained the function of the law in the simplest and clearest fashion when he wrote, "In fact, it was the law that showed me my sin" (Rom. 7:7b). The Tribes of Israel needed to understand those behaviors, as well as those thoughts, which inhibited

God from bestowing the fullness of his Abrahamic covenant on the Children of Israel. Whether or not Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob fully understood God's will in their minds and hearts may never be entirely settled. Nevertheless, they left clear evidence of their inability to conform their behavior completely to God's desires. God decided the time had come to expose the entirety of sin. In spite of God's intention that conformity to his will should derive naturally from the heart and not artificially from rules and regulations written down, memorized, and imposed (Jer. 31:33-34), he knew the Children of Israel needed clarity, better yet, something in writing to which they could refer in later generations (Exod. 20-23). Their need necessitated Moses.

The account of Moses found in Exodus 2:1-10 tells a simple story of a baby first saved from death by the daughter of the very Pharaoh who had commanded that death (Exod. 2:1-10). It continues with this baby growing into a man, a man enjoying all the benefits of Pharaoh's family yet one who in outrage kills an Egyptian for beating a Hebrew and who then flees, finally, from his privileged lifestyle into Midian in fear of the Pharaoh's wrath. It concludes with the nation of Israel's triumphant entry into the land first promised by God to Abraham six hundred years earlier (Adler 51). Sadly, Moses never actually entered the Promised Land. God halted him at the Jordan River for failing to reveal God's holiness to the people (Deut. 32:50-52).

In the midst of this journey, Moses led the tribes of Israel out of Egypt and into the desert. He engendered trust by mediating God's gift of manna and quail (Exod. 16:11-12) and finding water for them in the midst of the desert (Exod. 15:25; 17:6). The people trusted only Moses to climb Mt. Sinai and meet directly with God (Exod. 20:19).

Exodus 20:1-17 records God's gift of the Ten Commandments; chapters 21-24 the rest of his commands. The Ten Commandments describe those things for which God expects self-discipline and abstinence, barring of course the fourth and fifth commandments. The fourth commandment begins with behavior to be encouraged, segues into prohibitions, then turns right back to encouraging them to rest. The fifth commandment, in contrast, counsels the people to give honor to their parents. Its addendum includes the reward of long lives in the Promised Land itself, not elsewhere.

Previously I noted the need to distinguish between sin and not sin, even righteousness. These two pivotal commandments serve just that purpose. The fourth commandment rewards wholesome activity with a reminder not to sin by refusing Sabbath to the lesser members of the household. The fifth offers nothing but reward. Freely paraphrased, it says, "Love and take care of those who loved and took care of you. Then move out the way while I pour my blessings out upon you!" God then notes the proper manner in which to build altars to him and the ways in which he wants his people to interact. In 23:10b, God lays out his plans for feeding the poor among his children, of particular importance to this review.

Actually, at this point, God had said everything that needed to be said in order to help the nebulous nation of Israel coalesce so that God's reflection could be fully seen in them. Had he himself not been generous and merciful, he could have left them to their own resources for a time until trial and error revealed a way for them to obey as they learned from the errors they would inevitably make in trying to follow these commandments. God did not leave his people to their own resources. He knew they would need further training and encouragement before this lesson could be fully

understood, and without such encouragement, they might very well cease trying out of despair or frustration.

To wrap up this introduction to the project's literature review, let me say that God intended from the very beginning for his creation to reflect his glory. He planned for his creation to be a place where he could interact with beings that reflected back to him the very blessings he gave to them but through a lens of free will with the best of all creation fully surrendered yet totally liberated. God wanted humanity's love to reflect his love, generosity included.

The literature review simply portrays God's redemptive actions at various waypoints along this journey. It describes love, faithfulness, and sacrifice as seen in God's attempts to bring back his creation to the one it was created to love. It then summarizes these sacrifices God was willing to make for his creation through the lenses of generosity and abundance in his revelation and his creation's conformity to that revelation.

Biblical, Theological, and Historical Background—Contentment versus Greed

This review assesses first the biblical and theological connections between generosity and abundance as Jesus and his immediate followers, especially Paul, would have understood them. Included are the historical roots of what later became twisted into the *prosperity movement*. The review closely examines the teachings of the early church fathers and the impact those insights had on Christ's earthly kingdom, pre-Constantine. It then examines the history of generosity and abundance as Wesley and the early apostolic holiness movement rose up in opposition to the culture of Industrial Age. The biblical and theological component of this review concludes with examples depicting the use of

these insights within the kingdom of God in *age of greed*, better known as the twenty-first century, requiring a review of the existing theology currently labeled the prosperity movement.

Late Twentieth and Early Twenty-First Century Cultural Changes

Second, this review examines twenty-first century cultural pressures. This review clearly describes the marked differences between the generations described as *Baby Boomers*, *Gen X*, and the *Millennials*, underscoring the different levels of measured, as well as conjectured, greed and materialism. Additionally, the review examines the teachings of different social, political, and religious leaders, seeking to determine both the degree and the manner by which each of these influencers fashion each different generations' responses to and choices made regarding consumption, accumulation, and dispersal of things considered valuable by some people. Primarily from this component of the review, certain hypotheses emerged that determined both the method and the manner whereby the research underlying the paper's conclusions derive.

Interacting Insights—A Juxtaposition of Aspiration and Application

Long before Moses, God interacted with his children in order to produce within them the specific character that demonstrated to the rest of creation just who he was/is and why he was different from the false gods the rest of creation worshipped. Most of all, God yearned to produce in all creation an understanding that he could be trusted and, once trusted, loved. Oswalt points out that most of creation simply understood holiness as otherness. Holiness could bring blessings or curses, but it would always bring the sense of being different and separated from the gods they worshipped. God created the Law, as given to the nation of Israel through Moses, to demonstrate holiness as a mark of identity,

one that could be recognized in both the Creator's and the creation's behavior (*What Is Holiness*).

Therefore, when Moses asked God to reveal his name so the claim "the God of your ancestors has sent me to you," (Exod. 3:13) might be better understood and accepted, God answered simply, "I, myself, am—the one who is" (Exod. 3:13, author's translation). Early in the process of discipleship, most new Christians learn and accept the idea that God intended for certain aspects of his nature to be completely unknowable while permitting others only to be partially understood. Asserting this understanding to be axiomatic, this biblical and theological review highlights the juxtaposition and interplay among four basic Christian concepts—generosity, abundance, *koinonia*, and contentment—as they inform and determine the activities of members of the Church of God of Prophecy, living and worshipping within the central Kentucky area. In the process of refining specific meanings for each word and for the phrases containing the words, synonyms, antonyms, and other key linguistic constructs have been uncovered and their significance to the research brought forward and displayed.

Therefore, in order to produce comprehensible research, the basic meaning of the words and phrases applied to support the research were first refined and then used consistently throughout the project. Nevertheless, universal agreement should not be expected while distilling the setting and consequent usage of each term. As a result, the significance derived from this research, for some, will be entirely dependent upon the categorizations carried into its study.

Writers regularly establish word studies of varying complexity, sufficient to suit the needs of their proposition, which may then be read and, if not accepted, at least

understood by those assessing the proposition. Unfortunately, English words found in Scripture such as generosity, *koinonia*, abundance, and contentment derive from a wide number of Greek words to imply similar, yet subtly different, meanings in the Scriptures from which the proposition researched evolved. Even so, uniformity of meaning and application for the purpose of this research are first explained and then sought throughout the work.

The concepts of abundance and generosity, coupled with their day-to-day outcomes, feed into one another, underpinning the insights this research explores. With the framework of God's scriptural revelation of his kingdom, one term cannot fully be comprehended without an adequate understanding of the other. Similarly, use of words indicating *contentment* continually express the appreciative awareness of the kingdom's abundance just as the word *koinonia* offers the opportunity for the expression of generosity within the kingdom of God as led by Christ. Once this dependent relationship among these four concepts is better clarified, additional questions naturally emerge. The review examined the interaction between the concepts of abundance and generosity, contentment and *koinonia*, as they are understood in the unfolding of God's plan for Christ's Kingdom, exploring whether these tenets remained consistent with the early church's experience of the Kingdom in Acts 2-4. It also explored whether the understandings of these concepts as they are used today still contain the same essence and impact they had when Jesus taught them to his disciples and his disciples taught them to the same early church described in Acts 2-4. The review also sought to establish whether changes sufficient to significantly alter their use and application had taken place over time. This study seeks to offer insight into the resolution of these questions.

Abundance. Jesus' view of abundance may not entirely coincide with the view commonly held in the twenty-first century. Phillip Babcock Grove defines abundance as "a great quantity or amount: large number: plentiful supply: overflowing fullness: great plenty: profusion: plentiful supply of means or resources: affluence, wealth." From the same worldly dictionary, abundance might be considered to carry a stronger sense of plentiful supply than prosperity, "the condition of being successful or thriving: a state of good fortune; especially: financial success" (Grove). However, the literature review demonstrates how the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have reversed that understanding, especially in evangelical Christian communities.

Jesus' use of the Greek indicates financial success alone should not be a limiting factor in gaining a full understanding of the term abundance. One such Greek word used by Jesus, περισσεύω, often translates to imply "more than what would be expected" (Louw and Nida 59.52) though not always material excess. Arndt and Gingrich assert in its first listing, "be more than enough, be left over" (650). However, since *Koine* Greek, like many languages, depends so strongly on context in order to fully understood (Smith 32-33), a few contextually constrained meanings are listed here:

περισεύω

a be in abundance: **59.52**

b provide in abundance: **59.54**

c have more than enough: **57.24**

d excessive: **78.31**

e cause to be intense: **78.32**

f have greater advantage: **65.47**

(Louw and Nida 195)

Usage would then place boundaries upon meaning.

Arndt and Gingrich also list an interesting usage from the work *Hermas*, Similitude 5, 5, 3, "ὁ χρόνος ὁ περισσεύων εἰς τὴν παρουσίαν αὐτοῦ," in which

περισσεύων is translated as simply “remains” (650). The context and usage they cite implies nothing excessive, nothing in even the broadest usage. The translation, “the time which remains until his coming,” similarly lacks any indication of excess (Roberts, Donaldson, and Coxe 2: 35). Louw and Nida make no reference to Hermas in defining περισσεύω, and each definition supplied refers to variations on the concept “considerably more than what would be expected” (59.52). Still, for this specific usage, Louw and Nida do note the difficulty in finding expressions of quantity and phrases corresponding to the idea, “to abound,” indicating their awareness of the inexactitude found in the usages of περισσεύω than would be obvious from their initial interpretations (59.5).

In Matthew 5:20, Jesus used περισσεύση to warn his listeners their righteousness should be in excess of the Pharisees in order to gain Heaven (Louw and Nida 78.31). However, Tobit 4.16 uses the same word, περισσεύση, to mean surplus (Tan, deSilva, and Hoogendyk 2: 825). Based on both Randall K. Tan, David A. deSilva, and Isaiah Hoogendyk along with Louw and Nida, περισσεύση would mean more than mere surplus.

In Matthew 13:12, περισσευθήσεται is used to indicate an excess of wisdom and insight (Arndt and Gingrich 651). Matthew 14:20 uses περισσεῖον to indicate leftovers, universally understood as excess, which exceeded twelve baskets. Mark 12:44 follows the same pattern with περισσεύοντος, indicating a continual excess of money. In Luke 15:17 Jesus used περισσεύονται to mean a large accumulation and an abundant supply but not to imply extreme wealth (Kittel and Friedrich 59). Arndt and Gingrich, however, define the term to mean as being “rich ... of or in [something]” (651) and then imply that this understanding agrees with how Jesus intended it in his parabolic use in Luke 15:17. Louw and Nida support this understanding with the phrase “to have an overabundance”

(57.24) while Arndt and Gingrich use “be extremely rich or abundant, overflow” (650). These definitions require disciples or scholars to distinguish between the blessing that encumbers and the blessing that encourages big-hearted liberality.

The demand to distinguish an encouragement from an encumbrance is nowhere made sharper than in John 10:10. Jesus’ words, “ἐγὼ ἦλθον ἵνα ζωὴν ἔχωσιν καὶ περισσὸν ἔχωσιν” (Nestle and Aland) and their context leave no doubt he intended to bridge the gap between abundance as mere wealth and abundance as a blessing that fully satisfies. Jesus described an abundance that provides such excess that the idea of hoarding it, or of only sharing it to ensure it never runs out, has no room in which to take root. George Raymond Beasley-Murray, however, views Jesus’ abundant life solely from the viewpoint of salvation and life in the kingdom, which comports well with Jesus as the door but lacks in Jesus’ vision of himself as the shepherd. Good shepherds and green pastures are mentioned together far too often in the Old Testament (Isa. 14:30; 40:11; Jer. 23:3; 33:12; Mic. 7:14; Zeph. 2:6) to defend Beasley-Murray’s oversight.

As a result, the biblical, theological, and historical components of this study seek to compare and contrast the understandings Jesus and the earliest *ekklēsia* developed to explain the extremes of wealth and poverty common to their experiences as opposed to those fashioned for a world which claims to possess a middle class. To achieve greater clarity the review seeks to determine whether Jesus knew or experienced an abundance other than the types of abundance related to extreme poverty or mega-wealth. This study focuses upon the interactions of abundance, generosity, contentment, and *koinonia* among the demographic colloquially known as *middle-class*. However, in order to do so,

it will first need to determine what state satisfies a Scriptural understanding of abundance and what circumstances and behavior would indicate the presence of greed.

Jesus spoke to situations where excess resulted from God's favor. He acknowledged excess as the normal course of having overabundance, or far more than reasonable in a given situation. He also recognized the ruin such overabundance creates when the yearning for excess reveals a desire for a type of security, controllable by the possessor of excess rather than by the one bestowing it. Jesus taught that enormous excess often focuses the holder's energy and devotion toward the excess itself rather than toward the one who made such overabundance possible, creating miserliness that quickly forgets the one who provided the abundance. The story of the rich farmer in Luke 12:16-21, which contrasts ὁ θησαυρίζων ἑαυτῷ, "the man who makes a treasure for himself," as opposed to the one who is εἰς θεὸν πλουτῶν, rich toward God, makes this point clearly (Johnson 199). This man's overabundance drove him to provide for his own security.

In Mark 12:44, Jesus described such tightfistedness when he diminished the gifts of the wealthier givers as convenient, coming only from their excess and not from their living, causing them to "suffer no real harm in doing so" (Donahue and Harrington 364). In this case, Jesus, in Mark 12:44, merely labeled the gifts of the wealthier as *leftovers* (Louw and Nida 59.52). These contrasts indicate a partial answer to the earlier question regarding abundance leading to greed. Mark 12:38-39 points to a type of giving that comes entirely from self-serving abundance, one used for honor and societal advancement, while Mark 12:44 directs the reader to the type of giving that demands commitment and sacrifice since it comes entirely from scarcity. John R. Donahue and Daniel J. Harrington emphasize the contrast between the two kinds of religious persons.

The first kind of religious person loves attention and hates to sacrifice beyond their convenience. The second kind views abundance differently and gives out of love, even though their gift may lead to later want (364-65). Jesus commended the second view but not the first.

In Luke 15:11-32, Jesus taught the parable of the Prodigal Son or, perhaps better, the Lost Son. The axis of the story focuses on the interaction of the father with his two sons and the father's unwavering response when the two sons display entirely different behaviors. A full understanding of abundance, or even excess, in this parable would demand greater attention to the seemingly unlimited resources displayed by the father. Even after having given his youngest son his inheritance and even after restoring him once again to the fullness of his former position as son, the father still comfortably, even off-handedly, reminded his elder son that everything he the father possessed lay at his, the elder son's, disposal anytime he might care to use it. In this parable, abundance describes extreme excess, even limitless abundance, although one which, due the father's eagerness to share with both children and servants, in no way created a desire in the father to provide for his own security.

Nevertheless, Luke 15:17 depicts Jesus using the word *περισσεύονται* to indicate *abounding* in order to describe the material state of his father's servants (Johnson 237). This usage provides the key to understanding abundance in the kingdom. It is having enough to be generous at all times. It does not always imply, however, having enough to be generous with plenty left over.

Abundance can sometimes mean just enough for the bearer and those with whom the bearer has been blessed to share. In 1 Kings 17:8-24, Scripture tells the story of the

Elijah, the widow, and her son. Not only does the widow feed the three of them for many days, but “There was always enough flour and olive oil left in the containers, just as the Lord had promised through Elijah.” In this case, God provided the necessary amount only when the specific need arose.

The use of the *lemma*, πλοῦτος, throughout the New Testament reminds readers of this reality. Used in twenty-two times in the Eduard Nestle Kurt Aland’s 27th Edition of the Greek New Testament, every use of this noun refers to the concept of overabundance. The same is true of the verb form. The verb form is used twelve times in the New Testament, each describing the act of desiring, possessing, becoming, or deluding oneself about riches or the consequences of wealth. The adjectival form, found twenty-eight times in the New Testament, each time describes a person or persons having an abundance, even in those cases demonstrating kingdom reversals—James 1:10 and James 2:5 or when used to describe God, Jesus, or an attribute of either one—2 Corinthians 8:9 and Ephesians 2:4. The adverbial form, found four times in the New Testament, follows a similar pattern. In Colossians 3:16, it describes how the word of Christ dwells richly within the believer, while in 1 Timothy 6:16 the adverb enhances this understanding of how God richly provides for the believer’s enjoyment. In Titus 3:6, this form describes God pouring upon his children, richly, through Christ, the Holy Spirit. In 2 Peter 1:11, this form requires an adjectival gloss to make sense even though the Greek shows this adverb demonstrating the rich provision of entrance into the kingdom.

In 2 Corinthians 9:8, Paul uses the word ἀντάρκειαν to indicate “contentment, self-sufficiency” (Arndt and Gingrich 122), which when coupled with περισσεύητε provides “ample means” to accomplish all good works (651). Paul W. Barnett phrases 2

Corinthians 9:10, “God the fruitful provider will bless the generous giver with enough for his needs and will also enlarge the harvest of his righteousness or ‘multiply (his) resources’ (RSV) for good works” (153). Paul does not want to convey the idea of great riches. Instead, he seeks to instill confidence in joyful giving.

Although Jesus himself noted in Luke 9:58, “Foxes have dens to live in, and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place even to lay his head,” he nevertheless appears to have viewed abundance from the position of one expecting to satisfy the need. Paul, in slight contrast, seems to view abundance more from the perspective of those expecting to have their needs satisfied. In other words, Jesus expected to provide while Paul expected to receive. This difference is small but by no means insignificant. I recognized its presence but was not always able to identify its source throughout the study.

Jesus no doubt knew Proverbs 10:2 and 11:4 quite well, too. Proverbs 10:2 says, “Treasures gained by wickedness do not profit, but righteousness delivers from death.” Proverbs 11:4 reads, “Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death.” Gary A. Anderson offers an intriguing exegesis of these passages as the source of the idea that verses Sirach 29:12-13 evolved from a Second Temple understanding of the Hebrew term *šĕdāqâ* as “almsgiving,” an understanding buttressed, but not dependent on, the Greek translation of *šĕdāqâ* into *ἐλεημοσύνη*, which Louw and Nida render at 57.112 as “that which is given to help the needy” (“Treasury” 352).

Anderson’s insight, however, transforms into challenge less than three years later when he further exegetes Proverbs 10:2 to mean, “The goods you hoard in earthly treasuries provide no benefit; but heavenly treasuries funded by charity deliver from

death” (“Metaphysics” 16-17). As noted previously, Jesus agreed. Not only did he support the idea that “heavenly treasures funded by charity deliver from death,” but he affirmed how deadly earthly treasures can be to one’s soul when they distract their owners from following him. Anderson himself used the Markan version of the rich young ruler to underline his point.

Nowhere in Scripture, however, did Jesus label wealth or abundance as evil. Instead, he labeled as evil the mastery they frequently assume over those who possess them (Luke 16:13), the lies they spread among the foolish (Luke 16:25), and the belief that wealth and abundance can provide security against the concerns of this world (Luke 12:20-21) as the chief difficulties facing those upon whom God pours his blessings. These riches, or abundance, often pile up so high that they block both the view and the relationship between the very God who created them and the ones with whom he would share them.

Generosity. In wrapping up the understanding of abundance gained from the literature, a pronounced overlap in the use of both abundance and generosity developed. In order to avoid confusion, the contrast of treasures on earth and in heaven differs greatly according to their usage. The abundance of the heavenly treasury depends entirely upon the owner’s use of an earthly treasury for the benefit of others.

At this point, highlighting the information other passages containing the Hebrew word שְׂדָאָה, transliterated *šēdāqâ*, intend this word to convey provides further insight into the tight, perhaps overlapping, connections among righteousness, generosity, and the building up of abundant heavenly treasures. Doing so also builds on the insights

Anderson demonstrated in his two articles. In my opinion, the Anderson's insights must be classified as worthwhile speculation until more detailed work can be completed.

Oswalt, however, leaves little doubt as to his interpretation:

Just like the English "noble," Hebrew *ndb* may refer to social standing, but its root meaning refers to character, someone who is generous and large-hearted, someone who knows that an all-wise God supplies his needs and therefore can afford to be generous to those less well off than he. (545)

Previously generosity was defined as "the property of acting against one's worldly best interest, viewing others' need ahead on one's own or self-forgetful love." Isaiah 32:8 confirms the definition of generosity I use in this research "But generous people plan to do what is generous, and they stand firm in their generosity" (NLT). The NKJV translation reads similarly: "But a generous man devises generous things, and by generosity he shall stand." Both verses omit the important understanding that teaches the need for generosity even when being generous might have adverse consequences, but their emphasis on generosity's ability to sustain those who rely upon it support the claim that righteousness and generosity are frequently interchangeable.

Anderson declares the connection between almsgiving and salvation rather strongly: "If we can grant that the teaching of Jesus about the cross mirrors his teaching about wealth, then concerns about altruism that seem so natural for the latter should be transferable to the former" ("Metaphysics" 17). Anderson's reasoning sounds very similar to Jesus' comments about camels going through the eyes of needles (Mark 10:25). As Anderson notes, Mark 10:27 answers both "the teaching of Jesus about the cross" and his "teaching about altruism." Jesus simply states, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible" (Mark 10:27). Anderson's insights demonstrate

that the connection between almsgiving and salvation continues to confuse today's disciples as completely as it confused Jesus' almost two thousand years ago.

If Jesus' teachings about salvation mirror his teachings about wealth and abundance beyond basic self-sufficiency, then those who would follow him must respond consistently to both. One's attitude toward money provides insight into one's viewpoint toward lost and needy neighbors. Jesus' followers must surrender those things that seem most precious on earth in order to conform to the love that transforms the believers' hearts as we reach for the kingdom of heaven. This surrender is the *μετάνοια* discussed previously. His disciples' treasures in heaven are filled with love/charity for the needs of others (Anderson "Treasury" 351).

In this sense, unwarranted attention to earthly treasures prevents his church from fulfilling God's plan for his creation and, according to Jesus, enable those who trust him to misplace their faith more easily (Luke. 16:13). When this debilitating attention takes place, those who wish to follow Jesus become less able to participate in God's plan of salvation for his creation since it thwarts their "deep desire to affirm that the world was made out of charity" (Anderson, "Metaphysics" 18).

In Romans 10:12, Paul describes the Lord as one "who gives generously to all" (NLT), who is "generous to all" (NRSV), who "richly blesses all" (NIV), and who is "rich unto all" (KJV, NKJV). Πλουτῶν, as a participle, "means the Lord, who is rich (and generous) toward all" (Arndt and Gingrich 674). Of all the versions cited, the KJV and NKJV appear to capture most completely Louw and Nida's understanding, "to give." Paul was discussing salvation, not money and these insights should not overlook the actual context.

Luke's usage of *πλουτῶν* in Jesus' telling of the parable of the rich fool deepens the distinctions Jesus wanted his disciples to appreciate. In Luke 12:20-21, Jesus called the man to task, addressing him directly as, *ἄφρων*, perhaps most politely phrased, "unthinking one" (Nestle and Aland). Then, in verse 21, he refers back to this label of contempt and condemnation, proclaiming the lack of forethought in amassing great worldly riches while neglecting to accumulate an equally enormous, equally rich, hence *πλουτῶν*, relationship with God. The rich, miserly man failed to grasp that he could not eternally hold on to the treasure in his barns, thereby neglecting to accumulate, through generosity, a treasure in heaven that he could hold on to for eternity.

Kittel and Friedrich demonstrate the depth of the rich fool's confusion:

When God says "Thou fool" to the rich man in Lk. 12:20, he makes it clear to the rich man that he has not reaped anything for himself (ψ 38:7). Lulling himself in false security, the rich man does not reckon with God; this is his folly, his sin. (9:231)

The rich man simply forgot to be generous to others in need, as God intended him to be when blessing him. He did not think to consider God in his plans. He did not act generously on earth. Therefore, he failed to accumulate abundantly in heaven. In God's eyes, he became a fool.

Similarly, in the parable of the shrewd manager, Jesus wanted his disciples to understand their naiveté compared to the world surrounding them. Even the shrewd manager knew how to accumulate friends who would help him after he was fired, although his method for gaining their aid was dishonest. Jesus wanted his disciples to realize the significance of being generous to others so they would be welcomed in eternity by those who were blessed by their earthly generosity. Those whom the disciples blessed on earth became the disciples' actual treasure in heaven. Jesus wanted his disciples to focus on other

people, not on themselves, so he told this story to shock them. Jesus deliberately told the parable in this way, accepting his listeners' shock and confusion:

What does emerge is that the disposition of possessions, while in some fashion exterior to the self, less important than the self, and perhaps even to some degree unworthy of the self, is nevertheless regarded by Luke as of critical importance for expressing the disposition of the self. (Johnson 248)

Jesus wanted his followers to be devoted to the needs of others in order to help them develop greater faith in God: “For by grace you have been saved through faith” (Eph. 2:8a).

In studying the information learned compiling this literature review, the Greek word δικαιοσύνης began taking on greater importance in understanding the role of generosity in the kingdom of God. The NLT translates the phrase “καὶ αὐξήσει τὰ γενήματα τῆς δικαιοσύνης ὑμῶν” (Nestle Aland) found in 2 Corinthians 9:10 to mean, “and then produce a great harvest of generosity in you.” The NIV translates this phrase as, “and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.” The NKJV and the KJV both use “[i]ncrease the fruits of your righteousness.” The NRSV says, “Increase the harvest of your righteousness” but the note indicates that righteousness could be translated *benevolence*.

Equating almsgiving, benevolence, and generosity with righteousness has been noted earlier in this literature review. Even more intriguing, when used in places where the two terms seem interchangeable, righteousness and generosity both reflect the manner whereby each should be displayed, from the heart, literally copying the character of God. The paper asserts the fluid interaction between the two, an interaction so completely intertwined, distinguishing between the two may only be academically possible.

Contentment. Defining contentment demands recognizing the frequency with which the Greek words rendered as abundance are often found in a context of contentment. What follows are the dilemmas and insights gained while puzzling out a clear distinction between the English words sufficiency and contentment as they are translated from the original Greek in combinations with other Greek and English words and when used by themselves. A simple word study will not help since English translations use both sufficient and contented in their various English forms to define identical words and ideas.

Instead, a more productive approach is achieved by exploring how Scripture defines a lack of contentment. Certainly, contentment is not anxiety and anxiety's presence would be complete proof of contentment's absence. In fact, Louw and Nida followed this same pattern when defining the word ὑπέρομαι: "In a number of languages 'to be content' is expressed negatively, for example, 'to not complain'" (25.81). The word ὑπέρομαι is used in Luke 3:14 when John the Baptist advises soldiers, "Don't extort money or make false accusations. And be content with your pay," which could just as easily be translated *and consider your pay sufficient*.

Another word, μεριμνάω, is used throughout the New Testament to describe worry and discontent. Jesus, in Matthew 6:25 began a train of thought: "That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing?" Jesus concluded his teaching on this idea by saying, "So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today" (vs. 31). As Witherington notes, Jesus' teachings frequently warn "about being so self-concerned

about taking care of one's own needs" (Matt. 15:1). Jesus wanted to free his listeners from the fears of daily life in order to allow them to focus on the righteousness of God seen so often as simple generosity, sufficient for the moment at hand.

Luke 10:41 offers another perspective, allowing the project to address the concept of expectations and entitlements and their relationship to contentment. Martha correctly recognized that she was doing all the work of preparing dinner for everyone gathered. This point must be clear. After her protest, however, Jesus calmed her down by pointing out she had become upset by paying too much attention to things less important than the concerns toward which Mary had properly decided to attend. Luke uses *μεριμνᾷς* and *θορυβάζῃ* to emphasize Martha's extreme level of discontent and frustration.

Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott translate *μεριμνᾷς* as "care for, be anxious about, meditate upon" (1104). Arndt and Gingrich translate *θορυβάζῃ* as "be troubled or distracted" (362), while Johnson uses the emphatic expression, "you are putting yourself in an uproar" (174). The NLT reads, "But the Lord said to her, 'My dear Martha, you are worried and upset over all these details!'" Jesus recognized and addressed Martha's total absence of contentment as well as her expectations, which created a sense of entitlement, resulting from Mary's decision not to assist in preparing the meal.

Another word translated as *content* is *κεκορεσμένοι*. Louw and Nida note two possible translations which might apply. The first denotes "to have enough, often with the implication of even more than enough" (558). The second reads "to be happy or content with what one has, with the implication of its being abundant" (297). They note at both locations the implication of irony and the freedom to phrase Paul's words as either a statement or a question: "Do you already have everything you need?"

Throughout Scripture, the concept of contentment demonstrates an acceptance of God's sovereignty and provision. Scripture's use of the concept indicates the importance for all persons, even for all of creation, to accept who they are and where they are until God chooses to reveal why they are. Contented people confidently depend on God to meet their basic requirements for food, clothing, and shelter. The often-cited passage, "Foxes have dens to live in, and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place even to lay his head" (Luke 9:58) was actually spoken to describe the cost of discipleship. Nevertheless, it demonstrates the contentment and sense of sufficiency felt by Jesus while on earth. It makes clear his satisfaction at being utterly dependent on God.

Koinonia. On the surface, *koinonia* appears a simple enough word to define. This apparent simplicity itself defines lack of genuine understanding held by the church at large. Churches often use the word *koinonia* to describe their fellowship. *Koinonia* must not be understood as simply gathering together or simply participating in something together. *Koinonia* requires a unifying event, created by God, that occurs between people *through sharing together in the same thing* (Kloha 30). Acting out together the precepts of a covenant with God and others would be *koinonia*.

Louw and Nida offer three different understandings of the word:

- 57.98** **κοινωνέω; κοινωνία, ας** *f*: to share one's possessions, with the implication of some kind of joint participation and mutual interest
- 57.101** **κοινωνία, ας** *f*: (derivative of κοινωνέω "to share," 57.98) that which is readily shared
- 34.5** **κοινωνία, ας** *f*: an association involving close mutual relations and involvement

Arndt and Gingrich offer similar, if slightly nuanced understandings of κοινωνία:

- κοινωνία, ας, ἡ**
- 1. association, communion, fellowship, close relationship
- 2. generosity, fellow-feeling, altruism

3. abstr. for concr. sign of fellowship, proof of brotherly unity, even gift, contribution
4. participation, sharing τινός in someth.

κοινωνός, οὐ, ὁ and ἡ (trag.+; inscr., pap., LXX, Philo, Joseph.)
companion, partner, sharer.

1. *one who takes part in someth. with someone—*
 - a. *with someone, expressed*
 1. *by the dat.*
 2. *by the gen.*
 3. *by μετά and gen.*
 - b. *in someth., expressed*
 1. *by the gen. of the thing*
 2. *by ἐν*
 - c. *with someone in someth.*
 - d. **abs.**
2. *one who permits someone else to share in someth. (438-40)*

Of the definitions and usages offered by Arndt and Gingrich, the two that involve people sharing in something seem to reflect best those Scriptures in which *koinonia* is utilized.

Building on these insights, *koinonia* seems best illustrated with the analogy of two hands, created by God, so tightly entwined that no finger can experience any event without all fingers experiencing the event, too. *Koinonia* is not the fingers or the hand, but it cannot exist without both. *Koinonia* is not the event either, but the event is necessary for *koinonia* to form. The hands must be created by God and must be united in Jesus Christ by and for the reason he came to earth:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (Luke 4.18-19, NIV)

They must be united in the spreading of the good news, by word and deed, throughout the world.

Interplay—Abundance, Generosity, Contentment, and *Koinonia*

In order to maintain clarity of purpose, the connection between the concept of abundance and generosity now requires deeper exploration. This literature review focuses primarily on generosity and abundance, with minor attention to charity and prosperity. Nevertheless, in order to clarify how abundance and generosity interact in the kingdom of God, I examined these ideas using insights gained from scriptural studies involving hope and surrender in order to provide contrast with the twenty-first century understanding of charity and prosperity, examining in greater detail the perception of control and expectation of results. The project offered clear distinctions between the worldview of the *prosperity gospel* and the worldview expressed by Jesus Christ.

In the latter part of the twentieth century, a phenomenon now known as the *prosperity gospel* emerged, according to Kate Bowler, out of the theologies underlying Kenneth Hagin's "Law of Faith", Thea Jones' "Law of Return", and Oral Roberts' "Expect a Miracle" (96, 100-02). The scope of project does not permit it to address the intent of the men and women behind these theologies nor seek comprehensively definitive distinctions between their different expressions. Kate Bowler's book offers a superb resource for attaining that goal.

Oswalt in *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66* explores the concept of continuity (112). Essentially, the ancient, non-Yahweh peoples believed themselves and their gods' realm, nature's realm, to be adjacent, congruent, and inseparable. In consequence, these peoples could sacrifice to their gods with a strong, sometimes certain, expectation of favorable results. Since the gods ruled certain characteristics of nature, when sufficiently propitiated, they would respond to their worshippers' pleas by starting and stopping the

rain, the eruption, or the barrenness as needed. They delivered fertility to infertile people, animals, and lands. In order to prove which of them possessed ascendance over the other, they would provide their worshippers conquest over or protection against those who did not worship them. These people believed living well depended upon giving well to the gods. They could not control nature, but they could bribe their gods with great sacrifices. Then the gods would/should control nature.

Yahweh said, “No!” Oswalt cites three passages from Isaiah in which God explains himself and another passage in which God defines the limits of these other gods. In Isaiah 41:4, 44:6, and 48:12, God described himself and “the First and the Last” and explains in more detail what this claim represents (*Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66* 112). In verse 41:21-24, God challenged these false gods to act in the present independently of their actions in the past, to provide their so-called proofs of power. Even Oswalt’s concluding sentence in this excursus depicts God as revealing himself anew, not based on something that had previously happened in the universe.

Bowler provides the remaining insight into the confusion over *abundance* and *generosity* as opposed to *charity* and *prosperity*. She describes Oscar Buford Dowell’s “from Dixieland to Canaan’s Land,” Oral Roberts’ limitless supply of bumper stickers, mottos, and personal testimonies, and Harry Hampel’s undifferentiated and undefined assertions of faith as supernatural law (102-03). In her index, under the heading of “biblical mathematics,” she lists numerous labels used for these supernatural laws:

end times wealth transfer
hundredfold blessing
kingdom millionaires
“Law of Return”
pacts
seed faith. (324)

These terms and their implications mutated and blended into one another over time, depending upon local churches and regional circumstances. In the 1950s, wealth joined with healing as another expectation (39). In the 1960s, the renamed prosperity gospel focused on the rugged individualist (99-100). In the 1970s and 1980s, the theme of individualistic empowerment grew to embrace both women and minorities, with the intent of moving them to the significant leadership roles. New techniques for reaching and attracting participants began to emerge and become more affordable (187-88). By the 1990s the health and wealth message transformed into sanctified self-help as “therapeutic language replaced sentimentality as the preferred medium of religious advice giving” (185). Even now, as megachurches and their pastors wax and wane, the emphasis on victory and success, common to the 2000s, embodies the new emphasis on perseverance, *faithing* harder, and making a greater effort to live fulfilled lives according to these promises (196-99).

These distinctions define the difference between the prosperity gospel and God’s unfolding plan for his creation. When contrasting and comparing the actual experiences of adherents of the prosperity gospel against those who joyfully embrace the belief in living abundantly as promised by Jesus in John 10:10, the question of *cui bono* or *for whose benefit* has to be forensically examined and its answer judiciously considered. Modern-day criminal investigators often seek to uncover those who will gain by the events that transpired in order to reveal both the motive and the beneficiaries of these acts. To gain a full and coherent understanding of the interaction between the abundance and generosity originally intended by God, this project intended to determine who benefits most from the beliefs taught by the prosperity gospel.

In faith communities based on the prosperity gospel, those with sufficient faith, who are fully surrendered to God, become healthy, wealthy, and successful (Bowler 18-19). They believe their success glorifies God. Whether they intend to say it or not, their witness and testimony claim that God receives his glory based on what they, who have adequate faith, receive from God. In other words, God depends on their faith for his glory, implying that God is in some way dependent upon his creation. Even if this claim could be true within the constraints established by God in his creation, and Scripture utterly rejects that lie, God's transcendence personifies his glory throughout his entire kingdom, certainly throughout his creation as well.

A favorite claim of those who follow the prosperity gospel is that God cannot be out given. This claim requires careful scriptural analysis to establish its validity. In the 1970s the prosperity gospel sought to apply this supposition within the bounds of humanity's earthly existence by advising givers they would receive the "hundredfold blessing" (Bowler 98). Other adherents, seeking to soften their claim, cited a "running over" blessing, referring to Luke 6.38 as evidence of the promise. As this line of thinking evolved, "[t]he faith movement's emphasis on results and the materiality of salvation easily absorbed the goal of church growth as a sign of its own faithfulness" (101). The prosperity gospel's underlying tenets make it possible for this theology to explain almost any fortunate set of circumstances.

Undoubtedly, most of those who follow this belief system look eagerly toward eternity with Christ. Nevertheless, those following this system expect to receive a substantial, if not their entire, reward here on earth. As it is practiced by most of its adherents and taught by today's most prominent representatives, the prosperity gospel

proposes that earthly prosperity depends on the amount of charitable activity practiced by believers in their lives. At its most extreme, adherents of the prosperity gospel appear to say, “Just give, no matter the nature of the relationship between giver and recipient. Simply have faith and give.”

Early in the movement’s history, even some proponents realized Scripture does not support either view (Bowler 54). Certainly, giving matters. Nevertheless, Scripture never fails to emphasize the motive for giving and to draw attention to the significance of the people receiving the gifts as much if not more than the benefits the giver receives. Additionally, in Scripture, the one in whose name gifts are given matters above all else.

God gives abundance because he enjoys giving it, εὐδοκέωα (Louw and Nida 25.87). God plans for humanity to give for the very same reasons. By their giving, those who give reflect the image of God to others who do not know God. God needs nothing, so he gives out of joy and to see how his giving blesses the creation he loves. He longs to see his creation give for the joy of giving rather than the gifts the giver expects to receive.

In addition, God gives to everyone, regardless of their relationship with him. He gives sun and rain to the good and the bad, the just and the unjust alike (Green, Brown, and Perrin 492). He is kind to the unthankful and wicked and expects those who love him to be compassionate to them as well (Johnson 112).

Furthermore, only God decides the interaction between abundance and generosity. His transcendence, as opposed to continuity, means humanity cannot reach out to God and obligate him in any way. God wants humanity to love as he taught them to love, not manipulate him according to some arcane set of rules. The Old Testament contains God’s explicit commandments on how to love. By the time Jesus came to earth, the faithful

discussed these commandments, their meanings, and implications daily. Donahue and Harrington provided a simple way to understand how these two commandments interweave to create within humanity the essence of God's plan::

Jesus also insists that love of God and love of neighbor go together and ultimately form one commandment. But by also keeping them conceptually distinct ("the first ... the second") he resists attempts to substitute one for the other and so to ignore either love of God or love of neighbor (see 1 John 4:20–21). (358)

Since this type of love flows from the changes known as *μετάνοια*, the actions that accompany godly love, as found in 1 John 4:20–21, can never be ritualistic or unthinking. God loves genuine, heartfelt generosity, not giving, or sacrifices that intend to benefit the giver.

Hosea 6:6 reveals God's desires plainly: "I want you to show love, not offer sacrifices. I want you to know me more than I want burnt offerings." Jeremiah 7:24 quotes God, saying, "But my people would not listen to me. They kept doing whatever they wanted, following the stubborn desires of their evil hearts. They went backward instead of forward." God wanted Israel to love him so much that they would joyfully obey him.

This love shown God failed to meet God's desires for humanity. Hearts did not change. Obeying the law simply meant following rituals like recipes. Jesus came to change hearts through his love from the cross. The behaviors seen in the prescribed patterns of prayer and giving practiced by *prosperity gospel* adherents mean no more to God than did the empty rituals Israel and Judah practiced before the Exile or those created by men who behaved as did the scribes and Pharisees Jesus sought to restrain. As noted in Matthew 23:2-5, they greatly offended Jesus:

The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long.

Certainly, the obvious implications of these verses point toward hypocrisy. Still, like the sacrifices described in Amos and Jeremiah, these Pharisaic rituals no longer had meaning to God. The salt had lost its savor. The Pharisees may have done good deeds, but they did them for the wrong reasons. Jesus said they, "honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me" (Matt. 15.8). They paid strict attention to trivial things while ignoring matters of great import (Powell 423). Their actions no longer had any godly direction in their hearts.

Abundance remains a consequence of God's love (Johnson 113). Certainly, he promises to respond to the generosity of those who love him according to the manner by which they dispense it, but he is under no compulsion to do so. He does it because it pleases him to do so. At 25.113 εὐδοκέω, Louw and Nida use the phrase, "it fulfills one's desires." Luke uses εὐδόκησεν, the verb, third person, singular, aorist, active, indicative form of εὐδοκέω, to emphasize how God becomes very happy giving those who love him the things they want.

God always remains in control of the gift. God does not pay off; God blesses. God examines the heart.

These insights reveal that an individual's abundance results from God's love of abundance. He blesses the evil and just. His activity brings the sun and rain, not anyone's ability to obey the rituals properly implicit when describing the things God enjoys blessing and the ways God enjoys giving those blessings. No one can cause God to give

if it does not please him to do so. First Corinthians 13:3 sums up God's economy quite succinctly, saying, "If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing." God wants to see those he blesses bless others.

Seeing those who love him love others pleases God. Conversely, while the practice of love helps people become more loving, focusing on the return disables the process because the return easily distracts the heart. Godly generosity functions best when the hearts of those who give remain focused on him and on the recipients of the gift. The cycle begins with God's generosity, which produces the abundance necessary for survival. As those drawn near to God learn to trust him and his generosity, sharing his abundance becomes the natural thing to do. Still, the expectation of return distracts.

As one's heart turns evermore towards God, gratitude for his abundance increases and a righteous desire to emulate him grows stronger. Generosity becomes the natural response and helps the hearts of those who give grow even more loving. God gains great joy in returning an even greater abundance, which increases still further the gratitude the ones who share feel and their desire to be just like him.

The process of abundance followed by generosity is a cycle, but unlike the cycles inherent in worship rituals formed through belief in continuity, God can "create something new" whenever he pleases (Isa. 43:18-19). Oswalt makes this point clear. The pagan gods could not create anew. God can and does as he chooses (Book of Isaiah Chapters 40-66 112).

Abundance, generosity, contentment, and *koinonia* are four concepts that can help better understand ways to ensure the human desire to enjoy God's abundance by

practicing generosity does not degenerate into self-serving charity and greed. In 1 Peter 5:1-9, Peter's situation offers a unique juxtaposition which may provide a significant insight into the proper balance between the presence of abundance and the presence of contentment, which together engender generosity in the name of Jesus, creating *koinonia*. This passage demonstrates the juxtaposition between contentment and fulfilling the will of God very simply:

And now, a word to you who are elders in the churches. I, too, am an elder and a witness to the sufferings of Christ. And I, too, will share in his glory when he is revealed to the whole world. As a fellow elder, I appeal to you: Care for the flock that God has entrusted to you. Watch over it willingly, not grudgingly—not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God. Don't lord it over the people assigned to your care, but lead them by your own good example. And when the Great Shepherd appears, you will receive a crown of never-ending glory and honor. In the same way, you who are younger must accept the authority of the elders. And all of you, dress yourselves in humility as you relate to one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honor. Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.

Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith. Remember that your family of believers all over the world is going through the same kind of suffering you are.

Peter knew well the problem of self-serving spirituality. In Luke 22:33, he boldly proclaimed, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death!" only to find himself failing dramatically in the courtyard of the high priest. Luke 22:62 states simply, "And he went out and wept bitterly." He found himself deeply humbled after his earlier boast.

Sadly, for Peter, his humbling did not end in the courtyard. After the resurrection, Luke 24:12 asserts he missed seeing Jesus near the tomb. Luke 24:36 states he did not see

Jesus until later that night, after the two disciples going to Emmaus had returned to the upper room. Even when the disciples gathered in Galilee at the Sea of Tiberias, Peter is nowhere shown to have talked directly with Jesus until Jesus cooked the fish along the shore. Only after this breakfast, after Jesus questioned Peter three times about his love for him was Peter finally able to proclaim, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Peter could have easily have remained focused on *his* devotion and *his* loyalty to Jesus had he not experienced the heartbreak of the courtyard. In the courtyard, Peter learned to trust God to honor him and found the grace to humble himself in his actions toward others.

Beasley-Murray notes that at this time, “the rest of the disciples disappear entirely from the scene” and labels verses 15-19 a “Peter fragment” (404). Again, only Jesus, Peter, and the disciple who reclined next to Jesus at the last supper remained. Peter was clearly frustrated since Jesus asked him if he, Peter, loved him, Jesus, three times. Nevertheless, the idea that Jesus did not believe Peter simply does not hold since Jesus so frequently knew the thoughts of those near him who opposed him or who were disloyal. The simplest explanation works best. Peter deeply ruptured his relationship with Jesus, not recognizing the scope of his own denial even though he repeated his denial three times. Jesus simply made clear the rupture was now healed and Peter restored to his former position.

Because of his restoration, Peter was able to do as Jesus had requested in Luke 22:32. Peter, once he had turned back, did strengthen his brothers, as well as those in the Christian communities for which he had responsibility. Paul J. Achtemeier and Eldon Jay Epp propose that the phrase πάντες δὲ ἀλλήλοις τὴν ταπεινοφροσύνην ἐγκομβώσασθε

should not be connected back to the relationship between elders and youth. Rather, the phrase should be understood alongside the verb ἐγκομβώσασθε, meaning, “and all of you clothe yourselves with humility toward one another” (333). Using their construction, Peter’s humiliation freed him from meaningless pride and allowed him to accept his future powerlessness even in the midst of his enemies.

This lack of pride, then, becomes the key that demonstrates the proper balance previously noted between the presence of abundance and the presence of contentment, which together engender generosity in the name of Jesus, creating *koinonia*. A restored and redeemed Peter described a more humble way to act when blessed beyond expectation:

And all of you, dress yourselves in humility as you relate to one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honor.

Peter became contented with the abundance of his life in Christ. He experienced that initial contentment that enabled him to display generosity to people who were blessed by the *koinonia* created through the generosity he displayed in Christ. Together, they participated in the glory of God through Christ together, sharing their needs and their abundance freely without stigma as they were filled with grace.

God generously shares his abundance, including the abundance that is his Son. The community shares with God their abundant gratitude and with one another from that which God has given them to share. God knows the *koinonia*’s needs and rejoices in their asking. As he chooses, he generously pours out still more abundance, continuing the design he implemented on his creation in the beginning. In *koinonia*, he addresses sin that, through Christ, has been and continues to be healed. Humanity shares not to obtain

but in the certainty of God's provisions. The cycle of abundance, contentment, generosity, and *koinonia* can subsequently unfold and continue, all for the blessing of those in need and the glory of God.

Teachings from the First Covenant

The teachings of the Old Covenant reveal how, from the beginning, God acted generously, filling the entire first chapter of Genesis with a song of praise for that generosity (Brueggemann 7). In teaching the Children of Israel how to live in righteousness and holiness in the kingdom of God, he commanded the Israelites not to hoard but to share their harvest with the poor and the sojourner (Douglas 347-48), specifically addressing a manner of doing so that took the name Pe'ah, from the Hebrew word for corner (פֶּאָה; Brown, Driver, and Briggs 802):

When you harvest the crops of your land, do not harvest the grain along the edges of your fields, and do not pick up what the harvesters drop. It is the same with your grape crop—do not strip every last bunch of grapes from the vines, and do not pick up the grapes that fall to the ground. Leave them for the poor and the foreigners living among you. I am the LORD your God. (Lev. 19:9-10, NLT)

When you harvest the crops of your land, do not harvest the grain along the edges of your fields, and do not pick up what the harvesters drop. Leave it for the poor and the foreigners living among you. I am the LORD your God. (Lev. 23:22)

God had a very specific plan to provide for the poor, and he expected those whom he had chosen to use as he revealed himself to the world to follow his plan closely.

In order to further delineate between generosity and greed, justice and injustice in the Kingdom of God, he again admonished the Children of Israel to treat each other in accordance with the law (Douglas 348-49):

Do not defraud or rob your neighbor. Do not make your hired workers wait until the next day to receive their pay. Do not insult the deaf or cause

the blind to stumble. You must fear your God; I am the LORD. Do not twist justice in legal matters by favoring the poor or being partial to the rich and powerful. Always judge people fairly. Do not spread slanderous gossip among your people. Do not stand idly by when your neighbor's life is threatened. I am the LORD. (Lev. 19:13-15)

This “juxtaposition of truth to God and truth to others is not incidental” (348). This juxtaposition is a key component of this plan.

In fact, Jewish teachers living immediately after the fall of the Temple understood God's commands to care for the poor and the transient very strongly. They began codifying them into a form that eventually became the tractate in the *Mishnah* called Pe'ah (Neusner, *Mishnah* xxx). These teachers arranged these commands into six categories of specific duties and obligations:

1. The corner of the field, or it can be a part of the field easier for the poor and transient to reach, which the owner must delegate in advance and leave standing (see Lev. 19:9; 23:22);
2. The ears of grain that fell from the reaper's hand or the sickle while the grain is being gathered during the harvest, the “gleanings” (see Lev. 19:9; 23:22);
3. The sheaves left and forgotten in the field while the harvest is being brought to the threshing floor, as well as attached produce overlooked by the harvesters, the “forgotten sheaves” (see Deut. 24:19);
4. Immature clusters of grapes or loose grapes that fall from their clusters while being plucked from the vine; and,
5. To set aside the tithe for the poor, every third and sixth year of the tithing cycle (see Deut. 14:28-29; 26:12-13).

The children of Israel, once settled in the Promised Land, were clearly given rigorous obligations toward the fulfillment of God's revelation to his creation.

Previously, the review addressed the use of the idea of treasuries found in Proverbs and in quotes from Jesus. Pe'ah addresses the idea of treasuries as well. M. Pe'ah 1:1, reminds its readers of the importance and the blessing in these treasuries:

- C These are things the benefit of which a person enjoys in this world, while the principal remains for him in the world to come:
- D (1) [deeds in] honor of father and mother,
(2) [performance of] righteous deeds,
(3) and [acts which] bring peace between a man and his fellow.
- E But the study of Torah is as important as all of them together. (Pe'ah 1:1)

Jacob Neusner's translation of M. Pe'ah 1:1 notes, "[W]hile the principal remains for him in the world to come" (Pe'ah 1:1). He further comments:

For the Mishnah contains a great many principles and propositions which can be shown to go back to the period before a.d. 70. Some of the most striking and important of these principles, those in the divisions on Agriculture and Purities in particular, but also a few in the divisions on Appointed Times and Women, may be shown to serve sectarian, and not general or societal, interests. (xxxiii)

Armed with these observations, the review links these ideas as having a similar origin. They will enhance the authority of those Bible studies intended to portray generosity as opportunity rather than burden.

The book of Ruth succinctly summarizes the end result of joyful obedience resulting from the complete transformation of one's heart and mind. Eugene F. Roop notes how the author of Ruth clarifies in 2:14-16 that Ruth "ate all she wanted and still had some left over" (44). He also notes the additional level of generosity Boaz showed to this ancestor of Jesus himself and how this generosity ensured "the alien" in verses 15-16 received far more than the specifics of the law (44). The reaction of these two people

highlights two concepts of generosity. First, in the kingdom, generosity maintains God's provisions for the poor. Second, in the kingdom, generosity enables God to provide for strangers, aliens, within the land.

God used the book of Proverbs as a way to share summary advice in Scripture. Unfortunately, many try to use this advice as though it were a collection of laws or, at minimum, propositions. Proverbs will confuse the reader if taken in that fashion. The more effective way of using them considers them to be sayings that require discernment and the guidance of the Holy Spirit in order to apply them correctly (Reese, Personal interview).

Proverbs 3:9-10 states, "Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine." Paul Overland, in correlating Proverbs 3:1-12 with the Shema in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, notes the Hebrew word *מַאֲדָה* or *mâ'od*, translated as *strength* in most English versions, would be better rendered as *material abundance*. In that case, generosity would apply not only to one's love of one's neighbors, but also one's love of the Lord. Then, generosity becomes an activity or an action, not merely a status required of both the first and second commandments.

Proverbs 21:13 warns, "If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered." This saying should not imply the author went looking for people who ignored the poor in order to find out what happens; instead, knowing God's ways, the author coined a warning designed to stimulate reflection and thereby generate wisdom.

Michael V. Fox, in response to Proverbs. 24:30-34, phrases it this way:

The sage saw the vineyard of a man he knew was lazy (that is the way he is defined in v. 30), noted its run-down condition, and “took a lesson.” But his observation does not ground his actual conclusion, which is that a bit more sleep (not necessarily a lifestyle of sloth) brings on poverty. What happens in v. 32 is not inference of a conclusion but the taking of a lesson. (673)

This taking of a lesson allows the point to be made that over-sleeping may sometimes be a valid description of laziness.

One more example of the aphoristic nature of the lessons available in the Books of Wisdom comes from Ecclesiastes 5:10-12 where the author contrasts anxiety with contentment:

Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless. As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to the owner except to feast his eyes on them? The sleep of a laborer is sweet, whether he eats little or much, but the abundance of a rich man permits him no sleep. (NIV)

As Fox stated so clearly, the author likely did not seek out a representative sample nor convene a series of focus groups to determine whether this assumption could be falsified. Instead, this teaching comes from “not inference of a conclusion but the taking of a lesson” (673). The author no doubt had noticed similar behaviors and recognized the dangers.

In the Old Testament, God demonstrated the ideal relationship he intended between generosity as the activity of *koinonia*, which enables the sharing of abundance. Though the Children of Israel did not know God’s intentions at the time, God had already begun the process of sanctioning *koinonia* through the faith of his Son, Jesus Christ. The **V** pattern depicting the pathway of creation was already focusing on the climax of Jesus Christ.

Abundance and Generosity as Jesus and His Immediate Followers Would Have Understood Them

Jesus, in Matthew 25.34-40, made clear that the commandment to love others as oneself requires a change in one's actions as well as a change in one's thinking:

Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me."

Then these righteous ones will reply, "Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you something to drink? Or a stranger and show you hospitality? Or naked and give you clothing? When did we ever see you sick or in prison and visit you?"

And the King will say, "I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!"

Jesus' words about the demands of generosity and the compiled rabbinical teachings known as the *Mishnah* parallel too closely to be mere coincidence. Neusner, explaining why the oral tradition became codified into the *Mishnah*, states, "The Mishnah's sages worked out a Judaism without a Temple and a cult" ("Formation" 23). Recognizing the Temple still stood during Jesus' life enables us to conclude that while Jesus likely did not learn from the *Mishnah*, as a written book, he may very well have been exposed to the oral and written origins from which the *Mishnah* derived.

Convincing evidence of the influence the book of Leviticus and its oral interpretations that later evolved into the *Mishnah*, the *Gemara*, and the *Talmud* had on Jesus can be found in his familiarity with Leviticus 19 in general. When he combined Deuteronomy 6:5 with Leviticus 19:8 in Mark 12:29-31 and in Matthew 22:37-40, he followed a tradition long known among the scholars of Israel. Therefore, when he approved of the merged version cited to him by a lawyer questioning him about eternal

life in Luke 10:27, “He answered, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.’” At this point, he ceased merely reciting Scripture and joined in the ongoing process of contextualizing it (Johnson 94-95).

As noted previously, Anderson makes a good case that Proverbs 10:2 and 11:4, lend themselves to the interchangeability of self-love and other-love (352). Those who love God store up for themselves treasures in heaven when they live lovingly toward those God wants to bless. James, in 2:15-16 makes this very point abundantly clear:

Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, and you say, “Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well”—but then you don’t give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?”

The actions of the hypothetical believers in James’ illustration demonstrate that their love for others and their knowledge of the reward desired, even though God never become obligated, provides a reciprocal spur.

Certainly, this statement argues in circles. To paraphrase a very learned scholar, the effective use of Proverbs requires discernment from the Holy Spirit because they can be confusing (Reese, Personal interview). This review argues that the knowing of a reward does not negate a life-altering change of heart.

The Gospels cite numerous stories told by Jesus. In addition, scholars continue to debate whether any of the twelve wrote any of the Gospels. Nevertheless, this review concludes that the twelve disciples significantly influenced the writers of the Gospels by their use of *chreia* when sharing their experiences with Jesus among the audience for whom each Gospel was written. Jesus left little doubt that he accepted and endorsed without reservation God’s open-handed generosity towards creation. Whether describing

the wonders of the blessings received from a heavenly father unburdened by sin (Matt. 7:9) or the generosity shown to weeds and birds (Luke 12:24, 27, 32), Jesus left no doubt of his unshakable belief in God's generosity.

In Luke 6:36-38, Jesus united four major concepts of the New Covenant in his instructions to his listeners—mercy, the refusal to judge, the refusal to condemn, and the act of giving generously. The image in verse 38 implies a form of reciprocal exchange (i.e., the same measure used for the gift will be used for the return), but as noted previously, the choice to respond remains always with God. When he does respond, he does so using the measure of generosity shown by the giver to measure his response (Johnson 113). However, the sheer enormity of the return, “pressed down, shaken, overflowing” (Carroll 154) emphasizes the grandeur of God's abundance toward the generous giver. The magnificence of God's response compared to limits of the original gift's measuring devices emphasize the differences between God's abundance and the giver's generosity.

Scripture most completely answers any questions concerning the disciples' understanding of generosity with the juxtaposition of Luke 8:3 and the parable of the extravagant sower, along with its explanation, in Luke 8:4-15. Scripture first teaches that Jesus himself depended upon the generosity of his followers. It immediately follows with the story of the generous extravagance of the one who sows the Word of God. Since Scripture includes Jesus' rebuke of Satan in Matthew 4:4 when he quotes Deuteronomy 8:3, proclaiming people live not only on bread but by the very words of God combining the concept of generosity becoming inextricably intertwined with life in God's kingdom gains added strength. Jesus' activity demonstrated his dependence on God and on those

learning to follow him. This activity allowed him to be dependent on others without the worry that would concern someone unaware of these connections (Carroll 182).

Abundance and Generosity with a Pauline Perspective

After studying Paul's letters, as they developed and influenced the kingdom of God on earth, the concern whether Paul followed Jesus' teaching closely or at a distance becomes an important consideration for the review's insights into abundance and contentment, generosity and *koinonia*. Certainly, Paul rebuked the Hellenistic understanding of reciprocity and the tit-for-tat relationship whenever he encountered among the churches with whom he interacted. In spite of this clear predilection, his distaste for reciprocity in finances was balanced by his equally fierce yearning for their love (Donahue and Harrington 128).

Jesus, in Luke 6:34-35, advised lending without considering repayment. In the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 6:3-4, he instructs his listeners to give in secret, trusting their heavenly father for their reward. Jesus foresaw a kingdom in which generosity, taking care of others' material needs, would be the automatic first response. God then would see the secret generosity and respond however he sees will best bless the giver, creating *koinonia* in activity of generosity for those within the kingdom.

Paul instead demonstrated his belief in the importance of bringing these issues fully out into public view, holding perhaps individual acts in private. Paul saw that "the Corinthians, who were (relatively speaking) rich, had agreed to contribute, but they had now ceased. The Macedonians, who were extremely poor, actually asked to contribute, and had begun to do so" (Donahue and Harrington 142). Paul chose to do so graciously, but he still chose to do so publicly.

Jesus taught the *not yet* of the fullness of the kingdom of God, which could not come fully into existence before the cross made possible the promise, “But among you it will be different” (Mark 10:43, NLT). He noted the need to live kingdom lives in the here and now instead of speculating idly about rewards in the kingdom yet to come (Donahue and Harrington 315). Paul, instead, emphasized the *already* in kingdom currently expanding on earth that had seen both the cross and the resurrection yet still struggled to trust entirely in the full implications of these events. Jesus addressed a covenantal, promise-based *koinonia* just blossoming into existence yet limited by the power of sin in the world, one entirely dependent upon an event set to transpire in the near future, albeit history’s most climactic event ever (Mark 1:45). Paul sought to confront and encourage a culture that preferred to rely upon contractual and reciprocal relationships with which the members of the *ekklēsia* were already familiar, using the example of Christ and his own rendering of it as an exemplar for the church to follow (1 Cor. 11:1).

These subtle, yet significant, differences stand out most distinctly when examining the teachings of Jesus and Paul through the lens of Acts 2:42-47. The editors of the NLT label this passage, “The Believers Form a Community.” Indeed, Pentecost had only just come and gone, leaving three thousand new converts needing the *ekklēsia*’s care. Jesus had died and been resurrected only months earlier. His teaching still rang out clearly in the ears of his converts, either having heard it themselves or having heard it from those who had heard it themselves. The Word was no more distant than secondhand and frequently shared by men and women the new *ekklēsia* had known their entire lives. The *ekklēsia* was family. The idea of family living needed no teaching; it was experienced daily.

Even so, less than twenty-five years later, Paul, in 2 Corinthians 8:1-15, found the need to exhort the Corinthians strongly about their giving by comparing the situation and the response of Corinth with the situation and response of the Macedonians in Philippi. Verse 3 states simply that they “voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means” (NRSV). Any secrecy, such as Jesus taught, which might have once surrounded this community’s giving patterns, disappeared entirely as Paul shared this new insight into mutual interdependence. In this client/patron relationship, the patron upon whom the clients depended resided farther beyond their reach than even the emperor, at that time the wealthiest of human benefactors. This patron demanded not worldly reciprocity toward himself but selfless giving, generosity that materially affects the givers’ circumstances while building up a dower of hope in a home from which only one has ever returned (Luke 16:30-31). Of course, Paul did not, so far as Scripture testifies, reveal the giving of any individual, which may be instead the crux of Jesus’ message.

Later in 2 Corinthians 9:3-5, Paul, not so subtly, reminded them of the potential for humiliation should the Macedonians arrive before the Corinthians were fully prepared. “[O]therwise, 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” (verse. 4). Beyond question, Paul’s language in chapters 8-9 simply overflows with references to the gift of giving (Rom. 12:8) and the gift of helping those in need (8:4) as well as the real-world realities concerning their reputations should they fail. Paul does not intend to shame the Corinthians into giving, but 2 Corinthians 9:3-4 leaves no doubt that

embarrassment remains an issue. He even goes so far as to remind them in verse 7 how much “God loves a cheerful giver.”

Therefore, in 8:13-14 Paul wants the Corinthians to understand how the people of Jerusalem will be able to help them when they need it. The purpose of their generosity is to sustain those currently weak so they will be able to help those currently strong should the situation ever become reversed:

Of course, I don’t mean your giving should make life easy for others and hard for yourselves. I only mean that there should be some equality. Right now you have plenty and can help those who are in need. Later, they will have plenty and can share with you when you need it. In this way, things will be equal. (NLT)

Paul leaves no doubt he intends to create a relationship of mutual support between the *ekklēsia* in Corinth and the one in Jerusalem. He dreams of a sharing participation or *koinonia* based on their love of Jesus, trusting in God’s abundant response to their covenant of assistance. Paul sought to recreate the *koinonia* of the church’s first years in Jerusalem among an entirely different culture and class of people, sharing an entirely different set of values (Witherington, *Conflict* 414).

Kittel and Friedrich state that Paul intended to weave the fabric of mutual interdependence throughout the *ekklēsia* he influenced (319). Although certainly not the entirety of Paul’s usage, Kittel and Friedrich leave no doubt Paul intended to intertwine the material and spiritual wealth of the members of the *ekklēsia* in the same fashion he wove a tapestry of an enmeshed community life through which no single member of the *ekklēsia* could claim the least form of independence from the *koinonia* of the whole. Per definition, this enmeshed community life would be maintained through actions glorifying Jesus Christ.

Supporting this distinction between the gospel of Jesus, the Christ, and the testimony of Paul, the Apostle, Wayne A. Meeks (10) and Justo L. González (78) both describe a process of conforming Christianity to the urban context within which it must thrive. González provides more information, describing how Judaism adapted to an urban context that compelled teachers of the law to seek after ways to interpret a law originally fitted for an agrarian economy as the people of the Old Covenant converted from life on a farm to life in a city (72). Meeks notes as well the effect even good fortune brings, compelling its recipients to move into the city in order to take advantage of whatever windfall came their way (15).

First Timothy 6:17-19 provides a summation of Paul's understanding of generosity and abundance within the Kingdom of God. Verse 17 says simply, yet completely, "Teach those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which is so unreliable. Their trust should be in God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment." Paul sums up Jesus' instruction to store treasure in heaven where it is genuinely safe rather than on earth where it is easily lost (Luke 12:33). He even reaches back into verse 32, reminding the reader that God provides all anyone needs, even pulling out of Jesus' words an insight that demonstrates how God provides even for their enjoyment (Anderson, "Metaphysics" 16-17). Nevertheless, even though Paul reminded the Corinthians of Macedonian's amazing generosity in order to spur greater giving, in 1 Timothy, he offered no advice suggesting how generously the giving should be.

Abundance and Generosity in the Catholic Epistles

James, the brother of Jesus, certainly suffered from no uncertainty about his relationship both with his brother and his brother's father. For example, James proclaims without hesitation that one's heart should engender one's actions and reactions (2:15-16). Furthermore, he does not hesitate to claim, if they do not then perhaps the heart deludes itself (3:11-12). James' certainty alone would demand his writing be evaluated for this project. His writing's coherence with the teachings of his brother Jesus, in the end, command this project's attention.

Unlike Paul and later writers, James wrote to halt the corrosive effect of society upon the *ekklēsia* rather than to restore the *ekklēsia* after the damage occurred. Witherington notes that the Hellenized Christians mentioned in the Johannine Epistles had become so comfortable with Greek societal norms, they could tolerate the city baths next door to an opulent, and therefore not unimportant, synagogue (*Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians* 404). James, however; wrote to Jews who were still close enough to Jerusalem to cherish both the city and the Temple (Blomberg 147). Though converted as early as Pentecost or as late as the moment James wrote these words, both they and their families still coveted their Jewish identity (Acts 15; 22). James accepted their Jewish-Christian identity. No doubt he embraced it for himself. Nevertheless, James maintained that the emphases belonged on the concept, *Christian* not on the concept, *Jewish* (Witherington, *Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians* 403). This letter intended to draw a definite, if very fine, line between the two. Even so, his admonishments concerning wealth carried as much a memory of the Old Covenant as had those of his brother, Jesus (Johnson 94).

James understood that in the kingdom of God, love for the poor arises from the worth given them by God himself. Therefore, as people valued and esteemed by God, the poor cannot be ignored by others who themselves receive the value and esteem from God and not from their own accomplishments. To act so denies both the love of God for those who receive his love and esteem and the determination of God to provide for those in need of God's assistance (McKnight 352-53). In Deuteronomy 15:11, God says, quite simply, "Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, "Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land" (NRSV). James recognized that his brother, Jesus, had taken the Torah and applied it to the *ekklēsia* after the cross.

James simply rephrases when he says, "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world" (1:27). For a people under assault by the culture surrounding them, James' admonition here and in 2:15-16 enables him to remind his audience of Leviticus 19:18b: "But you shall love your neighbor as yourself." By providing clear and convincing demonstrations of the manner whereby the teachings of the Old Testament demonstrate the changed heart emblematic of the New Testament, James draws a clear and direct line between their Jewish ancestry and its fulfillment through their participation in Christ.

The author of 1 John follows a similar pattern: "But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?" (1 John 3:17, ASV). This author, an eyewitness of Jesus' Judean ministry, deals with a situation similar in many ways to those dealt with by James

as well as those of Paul (Witherington, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians* 403). However, in order to deal more pointedly with a culture so tolerant of the general society around it, John sees the need to challenge not only the degree of generosity within his listeners but the nature of the love his listeners claim to possess (404). As the author notes, a lack of willingness to share from one's possessions, or to be generous, when a need lies directly before the believers and is blatantly obvious, seriously undermines the believers' claim to have the love of God within them. The immediacy and the enormity of the need compel a response from God's heart, and the believers stand in the very spot where they can answer that immediate need.

The connection between 1 John 3:17 and 1 John 4:20 deserves a closer examination, too. In both verses, the author directly challenges professing believers to account for behavior that so dramatically undercuts their professions of faith. In 4:20, some claim to love God whom they cannot see while hating people they know and can see whenever they choose. In 3:17, the author points out the believers' lack of compassion and then asks virtually the same question: "How can they claim to love God?" In both circumstances, the author checks the fruit for evidence of God within the branch and, in both cases, rejects the claim that either branch contains the presence of God. Using this evidence, this study intends to look for generosity not only as an indicator of abundance and contentment but also as a reliable indicator of the degree of surrender to God within a believer.

Noting the connection between 1 John 3:17 and 1 John 4:20 enables a richer understanding of 3:7-10. According to 3:17 and 4:20, love demands response. Whether the response offered mimics God's own acts of forgiveness as described in 4:20 or God's

actual form of generosity as in 3:17, each response points to situations intolerable in God's kingdom. Righteous living and agape love, therefore, involve relationship. Sin can only exist in the decline of relationships. Relationships decline only when neglected or ignored. Neglect occurs when one or the other party decides certain possessions do not belong to relationship and cannot be shared.

The Early Church Fathers Pre-Constantine

Throughout this section of the review, the perspectives shared by the sources cited point quite strongly toward a more open and straightforward interpretation of the most cited Scripture in James: "You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror. How foolish! Can't you see that faith without good deeds is useless?" (Jas. 2:19-20). Second Corinthians 9:10, and its use of δικαιοσύνης support the same idea. Said another way, the righteousness God seeks to increase within those who love him demonstrates its presence by increasing responses to need that can be more easily understood by the application of the concept generous, or generously, to virtues such as mercy, compassion, forgiveness, and charity.

Furthermore, generosity demands a substance with which to be generous and people toward whom to be generous. In the writings of the early church fathers, pre-Constantine, these requirements are clearly, often graphically, displayed. However, as the review moves into those sections designed to demonstrate how the early church fathers understood the interplay between the liberal application of these virtues and a subsequent abundance; clear, demonstrative statements of the importance of generosity lived out among the *ekklēsia* as evidence of the concept *koinonia* emerge into plain sight.

One of the earliest, extra-biblical, expressions of generosity as described by the word δικαιοσύνης has been assembled into a document known as the Teaching of the Twelve, or the *Didache*. It overflows with examples of generosity, most amplifying the teaching Jesus labeled the second greatest commandment, to love one's neighbor as oneself (1:2). Gathered together, they read as follows:

- 1:5 Give to everyone who asks you, and don't ask for it back. The Father wants his blessings shared. Happy is the giver who lives according to this rule, for that one is guiltless. But the receiver must beware; for if one receives who has need, he is guiltless, but if one receives not having need, he shall stand trial, answering why he received and for what use. If he is found guilty he shall not escape until he pays back the last penny.
- 1:6 However, concerning this, there is a saying: "Let your alms sweat in your hands until you know to whom to give them."
- 4:5 Do not be one who opens his hands to receive, or closes them when it is time to give.
- 4:6 If you have anything, by your hands you should give ransom for your sins.
- 4:7 Do not hesitate to give, and do not complain about it. You will know in time who is the good Rewarder.
- 4:8 Do not turn away from one who is in want; rather, share all things with your brother, and do not say that they are your own. For if you are sharers in what is imperishable, how much more in things which perish!
- 11:12 But whoever says in the Spirit, "Give me money," or something else like this, you must not listen to him. But if he tells you to give for the sake of others who are in need, let no one judge him.
- 13:3 Every first fruit, therefore, of the products of vintage and harvest, of cattle and of sheep, should be given as first fruits to the prophets, for they are your high priests.
- 13:4 But if you have no prophet, give it all to the poor. (Jones 19, 22, 30-31)

While this project explores how the virtue δικαιοσύνης, usually translated righteousness, demands limitless expression or, to the Western mind, unbounded generosity, nevertheless, the *Didache* reminds its readers that recipients bear responsibilities that mesh with those born by their benefactors. By emphasizing the recipients'

responsibilities, the *Didache* draws clear boundaries around those actions benefactors and/or communities can take under the guise of self-protection. To maintain focus, these responsibilities and protective responses will not divert attention. They will, however, be displayed for the sake of thoroughness.

Tony Jones describes the *Didache* as “the record of a primitive Christianity” (9), using the word *primitive* to connote a form of Christianity with fewer trappings and accoutrements than might be demanded for less simple settings. He contrasts the simple with the less simple since his experience with the *Didache* involved communities using it as a roadmap for expressing the love of Jesus to a fallen world. Jones deliberately interprets the *Didache* in this manner, and his interpretation reaches directly into the heart of those who believe excessive trappings block their direct connection with Christ Jesus.

Jones quotes Trucker Frank who observed the difference between the *Didache* and the communities it served and the twenty-first-century mainstream Christian community can best be summed up by the difference between orthodoxy and orthopraxy (63). The first focuses on right thinking; the second on right living. This project focuses on those contrasts between the beliefs Christians claim and teach and the actual events Christians experience while trying to live out their beliefs and teachings. The *Didache* will bridge quite well the chasm between certainty of thought and confidence of action.

In 1:5, the focus slides from the intent to give and the reasons to give to the practical experiences of both giver and receiver (Jones 19). In essence, the admonition to give without expecting repayment sums up Jesus’ teachings (Luke 6:35) while the warning to the one seeking assistance brings home to price of taking advantage of God’s obedient children. The same may be found in 1:6. Rather than focus on a heady

theological understanding of the need to give, it slides right over to the common experience of coins becoming wet and slippery in people's hands when they hold them too long (19).

Again, 4:5 slides from discussions regarding equity and fairness to the simple truth, "let it flow both ways." While 4:6 implies a ransom from sin different than Jesus' death on the cross, it never confuses the difference between salvation by grace and salvation by works. It simply reminds the community they all are forgiven transgressors (23). Just as Jesus generously dispensed grace to ransom all humanity from sin, believers should also generously dispense material goods that others might see Jesus.

In 4:8, the *Didache*, in effect, summarizes the earlier passages cited here. By stressing a commonality of goods placed to meet the needs of the community, it highlights the partnership that exists when *koinonia* thrives. It describes the relationships between those who have accepted salvation in terms of mutuality, with each sharing together Christ's grace, and then expands the concept further (Jones 23). Without explicitly saying so, 4:8 concludes by making the point since all who are saved share in Christ's eternal grace, which entirely belongs to him to dispense as he decides, and since all creation also entirely belongs to him, then all who are saved logically share in the temporal components that belong to him as well.

In 11:12, the book offers simple advice for understanding genuineness in those who declare themselves to be speaking for the Lord. If they ask alms for themselves, beware. If they ask to relieve the needy, do not judge (Jones 30). Though not stated, the one asking for themselves must not be asking for relief. They must be asking as though the givers owed them an obligation.

Though the passages 13:3-4 are not located closely together with 11:12, their connection seems obvious. The teaching in 13:3-4 addresses known prophets living among the community and adequately meeting their needs as well as the proper response a community must make when no known prophets currently live with them. In that case the obligation to give does not disappear. Instead, the recipients become those next favored by the Lord after his prophets—the poor. In no case should the community simply return the first fruits to their original owners (Jones 31).

The Epistle of Barnabas, or Pseudo-Barnabas, begins almost exactly as the *Didache* ended. These sections of each so strongly resemble each other that a direct connection between the two has long been postulated. Today, most scholars suggest an underlying “Two Ways” source responsible for these similarities (Draper 89).

Still, regardless of source, both documents stress a common theme when describing *koinonia*. The quote from the *Didache* has already been cited earlier. Compared against the Epistle of Barnabas, the two are virtually identical: “Thou shalt communicate in all things with thy neighbour; thou shalt not call things thine own; for if ye are partakers in common of things which are incorruptible, how much more [should you be] of those things which are corruptible!” (Roberts, Donaldson, and Coxe 1: 148). This similarity by itself demonstrates the practice of *koinonia* as a partnership among the believers, clearly occurring in a number of different locales throughout the earliest Christian world.

Justin Martyr, in describing the changes taking place in the lives of those who resist Satan’s influence in response to their love of God through Christ, his Son, notes how they transformed from people seeking wealth and possessions above all else into

people bringing whatever the needy lack into a common stock, creating a partnership that included their entire community (Roberts, Donaldson, and Coxe 1: 167). He describes how the ones who have an abundance share with the ones who do not, keeping everyone together, even those absent from their gatherings due to health, imprisonment, or other causes. Justin notes that in this sharing out, the partnership (*koinonia*) even includes the strangers in their midst.

Determined also to keep the *koinonia* intact, the author of “The Shepherd of Hermas” stresses first the tendency of wealth to distract its possessors from the *koinonia* of the *ekklēsia*. One example described the consequences possessing wealth brought upon the author:

For as a round stone cannot become square unless portions be cut off and cast away, so also those who are rich in this world cannot be useful to the Lord unless their riches be cut down. Learn this first from your own case. When you were rich, you were useless; but now you are useful and fit for life. Be ye useful to God; for you also will be used as one of these stones. (Roberts, Donaldson, and Coxe 2: 15)

The author then points out the compromising lifestyles that those with wealth are tempted to adopt, abandoning the *koinonia* of the *ekklēsia* in their enjoyment of the worldly pleasures (42). The author views the *koinonia* of the *ekklēsia* as an essential component to fruitful living for the wealthy. Using the example of elm trees supporting grape vines, he showcases the blessings the poor bring to the community through their “confessions and intercessions,” which God finds more pleasing and effective than he does those of the rich (32). He reveals how otherwise, without the fruit of the poor, the rich elm produces nothing.

Clement of Alexandria addresses the importance of having *something* that can be given away in order to illustrate full participation in the partnership called *koinonia*

(Roberts, Donaldson, and Coxe 2: 595). He reminds his audience of the elements of *koinonia* the Son of Man promises to stress at the final judgment in Matthew 25. In so reminding them, “[I]nasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these My brethren, ye have done it to Me” (279). Clement stresses the partnership that exists not only between Jesus and the oppressed poor but also the similar *koinonia* that must exist among the rich and the poor. In effect, Clement addresses concerns about the rich trying to swap places with the poor by selling all they have. Rather, he encourages them to accept their proper role of supporting others within *koinonia* of the kingdom.

He strengthens this point in segment 14 by demonstrating that wealth and possessions are not inherently evil. He reminds his audience that God provides both as he sees fit, enabling people to use them according to his purposes. Clement concluded, then, that the passions of the soul determine how each one serves the community, either for good or for evil. In his conclusion, Clement says simply, “[L]et him no more blame either God, or riches, or his having fallen, but his own soul, which voluntarily perishes” (Roberts, Donaldson, and Coxe 2: 604). Clement realized that the rich man who shall be saved is the one who can avoid the distractions of wealth and position and remain a dedicated partner within the *koinonia*.

Tertullian’s description of the commonality of life among Christians serves to make clear the impact of two vital elements that underpin this project: “One in mind and soul, we do not hesitate to share our earthly goods with one another. All things are common among us but our wives” (Roberts, Donaldson, and Coxe 3:46). First, the community, partnership, or *koinonia* requires material generosity and communal sharing in order to survive. Second, generosity, material or otherwise, cannot occur within itself.

Generosity can only be made possible by the existence a community in which it can take place. Clearly these two concepts depend equally upon one another and, though Tertullian's phrasing may clash against twenty-first-century ears, the essence of interdependence described by his piquant phrase occurs only by means of the interplay of activity taking place amidst the *koinonia* in which it transpires.

The writings of Cyprian, however, have to be understood in context to remain faithful to the New Testaments. In Treatise VIII "On Works and Alms" (Roberts, Donaldson, and Coxe 5: 476-84), Cyprian makes some very bold and challenging statements. Like James 2:20, Cyprian teaches that works have their proper place in the unfolding of salvation. Whether he overstates the point, not all agree.

Within this treatise are found quotations from Scripture such as Luke 11:41: "So clean the inside by giving gifts to the poor, and you will be clean all over." Cyprian, combining the Lukan with the Jacobean, says, "By almsgiving and faith sins are purged" (Roberts, Donaldson, and Coxe 5: 476). He goes further, citing Isaiah 58:1-10 to support his claim that when Jesus or Scripture refers to *good works*, they mean feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, freeing the oppressed, and housing the homeless. Citing Proverbs 10:3, Cyprian simply states that God will make certain those who perform such *good works* will never go hungry.

In Augustine's Sermon X, on the words of the Gospel Matthew 6:19, "[L]ay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth," an exhortation to alms deeds, Augustine, citing Sirach 3:30, makes a bold statement no one could confuse: "so alms quencheth sin" (Roberts, Donaldson, and Coxe 6: 293). Augustine preached this sermon in direct response to his understanding of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. This statement draws

indivertible attention to one of the major question behind this research (i.e., how inextricable is generosity with God's abundance), reminding his listeners of James' admonition, "How foolish! Can't you see that faith without good deeds is useless?" (2:20). Augustine left no doubt that he believed acts of charity and good deeds were overlapping concepts, if not virtually synonymous.

The Kingdom of God in the Age of Greed

Behind the determination to resolve as fully as possible the relationship between generosity, as the natural response of those who follow Christ, and abundance, as the state of existence that follows inevitably for Christians when obstacles within the heart fade, lies one simple pursuit—fostering a community of believers dedicated to the betterment of the *ekklēsia* through interaction with this fallen world by living generously, consistent with the commands of Christ, within that world. This paper proposes that generosity, as a primary response, and abundance, as the activating tool, are the interactions between sharing participants whereby God brings forth his *koinonia* into the world he created.

Chris Willard and Jim Sheppard depict three types of attitudes common around the issue of generosity. The first describes those who "have adopted generosity as the standard by which they live out their faith" (5). The second describes those who accept "generosity as an appropriate substitute for the more established language of stewardship" (5). The third, however, remains "skeptical of the notion of generosity" (5). The authors conclude that even the first definition fails to describe fully the level of commitment they claim the concept demands: "Generosity is at its core a lifestyle, a lifestyle in which we share all that we have, are, and ever will become as a demonstration

of God's love and a response to God's grace" (5). These two men describe a level of commitment best understood as fully surrendered or, more commonly, *totally sold out*.

Frank A. Thomas offers four responses to the economic hardship that comes when hard work and a quality education fail to overcome the economics of the twenty-first century (2). One, he writes, involves continuing to place one's economic hopes in the American culture's rags-to-riches ethos, a belief in a prosperity gospel that embraces the idea that anyone can prosper and become a millionaire. The other response seeks to interact with the first, neither embracing the possibilities of life within the United States, instead admitting they do not work for everyone and holding these dreams and possibilities accountable to the values found in the kingdom of God. These two responses directly address the concerns that lie behind this paper's research.

In recognition of these realities, others respond with their understanding of the *prosperity gospel*:

We define prosperity gospel as the teaching that believers have a right to the blessings of health and wealth and that they can obtain these blessings through positive confessions of faith and the 'sowing of seeds' through the faithful payments of tithes and offerings. ("Lausanne Theology Working Group" 1)

While some may complain this work addresses only issues located in Africa and not within the United States, this simple definition transcends geography and demographics. Certainly, they are accepted and proclaimed worldwide.

Bowler, though, rightly claims, "American audiences had made this gospel their own" (6). She sums up her work simply, in three parts. First, she discusses the influence of charismatic leaders among their congregations, large and small, established or disenfranchised. Second, she highlights the disappearance of an earlier, questionable

biblical ethic, self-denial, as a stony orthodoxy. Then third, she defines specific words with very limited definitions—faith, wealth, health, and victory (7).

Bowler, like the Lausanne Theology Working Group, also seeks to define the term prosperity gospel. However, she finds such a diversity within those who practice this interpretation of Scripture as well as a resistance to labels many view as unrepresentative of the whole gospel they believe that she chooses instead to offer the phrase, “Aesthetic, theological, and material validations of prosperity are sure signs that the complete gospel is being preached” (250). She further notes that rejection of suffering, sickness, and financial struggles as long-term conditions requiring long-term attention proved almost universal (176).

Twenty-First Century North American Culture—A Hangover from the Baby Boom

Elizabeth Hinson-Hasty asks, “What distinctive witness do faith traditions offer in response to the increasing wealth divide and chronic instability created for people living in poverty?” (40). Her concern forces believers to consider what circumstance transpired to lead the church, not just those embracing faith, wealth, health, and victory, but an entire nation filled with believers, to reach a place where material possessions could serve as the measure of Jesus’ presence within the life of a believer. Hinson-Hasty challenges believers to explain their twenty-first-century thinking:

When problems arise, such as the persistence of poverty, the inability to find family sustaining employment, or the inefficiency of people who have the burden of caregiving responsibilities for their family and people with disabilities who are unable to work, they are often explained as the result of personal moral failure. (46)

By stating this observation so unashamedly, Hinson-Hasty compels her readers to either answer this question, at least in their own minds, or to fall into a position of cherishing unsubstantiated beliefs.

Studying the differences and similarities between generations permits me to determine if certain trends are consistent within only one or two generations or dependable throughout an entire population, regardless of age. They enable me to hypothesize the generational existence of accepted beliefs that do equate poverty with personal moral failure. Comparing similarities and contrasting differences enables researchers either to support or challenge the insights that led to the creation of their research by measuring whether such insights prove to be only superficially valid or whether they likely will remain prevalent within the culture for a foreseeable period of time. The studies cited provide definite, although mixed, support for the insights upon which this research is based. They will, however, enable the research to evolve toward more strongly supported perceptions and away from those less valid.

At this time, access to studies about the generation known as the Millennials, aged less than 30 years old, has become quite easy, allowing trends identified with this generation to serve as a baseline against which the influence of such trends on other generations can be measured. In addition, such studies offer insights into other, emerging trends likely to permeate the entire culture over the next few years. According to *Millennials: A Portrait of Generation Next*, the youngest adult generation's attitude toward money and security may not actually differ as much as originally thought in their attitude toward material accumulation or greed. The Pew report notes while more than twenty years of study have demonstrated any society's youngest adults are consistently

more satisfied about their current overall situation than are older adults, the gap measured in this 2010 report shows that this level of satisfaction has grown larger than ever before reported (22). Coupling the report's findings that only 19 percent of unemployed Millennials have sufficient income to "lead the kind of life you want" (20) with the unemployed Millennials' belief that they "will in the future" (20) indicates the importance placed by Western culture that an individual's access to money appears successfully transferred to yet another maturing generation.

As does every generation studied, Millennials identify family as far more important than fame and fortune in their lives (*Millennials* 17). Even so, by a margin of more than two-to-one, Millennials value "being successful in a high-paying career" (18) more than all other adults combined. Ironically, the report indicates that young people believe, whether factual or not, that older generations have "better morals and a stronger work ethic" (16). Since the research underlying this paper demonstrates an expected tendency toward greed in the population over 30 years old, the inverse, lower morals and weaker work ethic, within the cohort now coming of age must also be examined to determine what such impact Millennials will have upon the body of Christ as that body addresses this current *age of greed*.

The tendency of many outspoken believers to equate poverty with personal moral failure has provoked a groundswell rejection, as entirely false, any hypothesis that dismisses poverty of every type as the fault of those so afflicted. Christian critics of a theology equating poverty with moral bankruptcy recognize the truth of the words of Pope Francis, spoken shortly after his election which describe the current morass typical of twenty-first-century economics: "The worship of the ancient golden calf (cf. Ex 32:1-

35) has returned in a new and ruthless guise in the idolatry of money and the dictatorship of an impersonal economy lacking a truly human purpose” (qtd. in *Joy of the Gospel* 55, 20). This statement sums up the impact of greed in the various sectors of life in the twenty-first century.

An awareness of this reality then adds additional urgency the Pope’s recent summation which included admonitions found almost two thousand years earlier in the *Didache* 4:8:

Do not turn away from one who is in want; rather, share all things with your brother, and do not say that they are your own. For if you are sharers in what is imperishable, how much more in things which perish! (Jones 23)

These similar, even if temporally separate, sentiments put forth the eternal nature of a communal, fulfilled life in the eternal kingdom while placing in perspective the transient existence of material goods such as food, clothing, and shelter. In spite of such guidance, God’s children clearly confuse these two entirely different things, in spite of their vastly different natures.

Of late, secular spokespersons, too, appear to be awakening to a similar message. Mark Slatter, describing how society consistently undermines a person’s inherent value while boosting the material value of perishable *stuff*, asks, “First, are we not incessantly and ruthlessly nagged by the paucity of our personhood, our state of life, our living conditions, and by what we do not have and who we are not?” (490). With this simple statement, Slatter defines an emerging discontent among consumers. Society is told five-bladed razors have greater value than three-bladed razors, therefore; the people with five-bladed razors have greater value and are better, too. People exposed to advertising, whether in the one-third or two-thirds world, endure this exposure this without ceasing.

This advertising reality Slater rightly highlights, noting that those who can diminish their insecurities with possessions do (502).

As a sidelight to society's subsumption by greed, Paul Virilio describes the resultant fear of criticizing the very things upon which people's hopes rest (Adams 170). While this fear may be nothing more than a restatement of the human tendency to minimize the faults of those choices they wish to promote, nevertheless, as Virilio describes them, these fears appear to be one reason technology savagely attacks any criticism whenever such criticism is leveled against technology. Virilio stresses that these attacks come from the aspirations held by a specific technology's promoters in order for them to obtain the benefits of their pet technology without needing to consider their technology's unintended consequences. As expected, Virilio necessarily wants to maintain a dialogue with those he hopes will eventually consider the unintended consequences of their choices; as a result, he carefully chooses his words. Most people, though, describe the actions of people who unrealistically minimize the faults of the objects upon which they have based their hopes, as simply *stupid*. Common, everyday people know such faults always come out into the open, and most everyday people do not care much what others think.

In this current *age of greed*, research reveals that society's emerging cohort of adults, the Millennials, demonstrates markedly similar aspirations to obtain material success as did the generations preceding. Furthermore, they place more confidence in the existing culture's ability to provide them with opportunities to earn the income they desire than do the older adult generations, currently aged 30 years and above. The Millennials even state that generations older than themselves possess superior morals and

values, as well as a stronger work ethic (*Millennials* 15). Due to the volume of information currently available describing this culture's existing greed, this optimism about their personal future finances indicates a less questioning acquiescence to existing cultural standards and expectations.

Research Design

The major difficulty in researching the impact of the prosperity gospel's influence on Church of God of Prophecy churches in central Kentucky lies in determining the understanding and application of biblical concepts of abundance, generosity, *koinonia*, and contentment held by representative church members within the area measured. The underlying problem motivating this research can be stated very simply. In spite of the abundance common to central Kentucky, people are still hungry, inadequately housed, and fearful that even their modest circumstances may be taken away. In order to determine the validity of the problem as stated, the research explored the cognitive understanding and experience of Christian generosity, thought to extend beyond convenience and into significant material self-sacrifice among the pastors and leaders of select congregations of the Church of God of Prophecy within the defined eighteen-county area of Kentucky.

Seeking to attain this goal, the research adopted a preintervention study designed around a theory or concept sampling (Creswell 208). The research used focus groups to gather information. These focus groups were moderated using specific questions designed to reveal the extent of the prosperity gospel's influence upon generosity in the beginning of the twenty-first century. Because the research expected the interaction between congregational leader and the members of the focus group to enhance

understanding as the subjects refined their intentions (Creswell 218), the pastor was included in the focus groups.

A major consideration in any qualitative research requires the researcher to determine “the extent to which the content of the interview is either predetermined or flexible” (Morgan, *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research* 11). Though not labeled as such in his own work, David L. Morgan describes his technique for conducting semi-structured interviews and focus groups using a concept he labels the funnel: “The funnel analogy matches an interview with a broad, open beginning and a narrower, more tightly controlled ending” (14). After consideration, I decided to provide a simple explanation to local congregation’s pastor on the intent of the research and the information to be discussed in the focus groups.

Similar considerations were needed when determining how to obtain usable information from each focus group. Since the research was guided by a very specific and limited purpose, I decided that specific questions must be asked of each group. First, the initial questions need to be broadly based to encourage the focus group to discuss, without too much prompting, their understanding of biblical generosity and biblical abundance in general. To record each group’s answers more precisely, I developed precise tools capable of recognizing when, or if, the group directed itself to include the *koinonia* as both setting and recipient or demonstrated awareness of connections between abundance and contentment (Creswell 205).

The Sample—Central Kentucky

Defining the area known as central Kentucky requires accommodating the homey aphorism that states simply, “[E]veryone agrees in the idea of a central Kentucky region,

but no one agrees exactly what that region is.” Defining an exact area proved to be a difficult task to accomplish. In order to maintain reasonable consistency, the sample was confined to the counties of Adair, Anderson, Barren, Bourbon, Boyle, Casey, Clark, Fayette, Franklin, Garrard, Greer, Harrison, Hart, Jessamine, LaRue, Lincoln, Madison, Marion, Metcalf, Montgomery, Mercer, Nelson, Nicholas, Powell, Pulaski, Russell, Scott, Shelby, Spencer, Taylor, Washington, and Woodford.

Research Methodology

The conclusion of the literature review outlines the method whereby the influence and power of the *prosperity movement* on the beliefs and actions of various twenty-first-century members of the Church of God of Prophecy, Cleveland, Tennessee, within central Kentucky was measured. The research was entirely qualitative. It involved the use of focus groups made up from leading members of local churches and their pastors, if the pastors were available. The focus groups featured guided, but open-ended, questions intended to develop insight into the understanding of biblical generosity, charity, abundance, and prosperity as well as their practices and experiences, either personally or as observed in others. After compiling the responses, they were examined for cognitive and experiential consistency with the doctrinal and biblical teachings of the denomination at large.

Summary

In summary, the literature review demonstrates two clear points. First, the understanding of generosity as one of God’s basic underpinnings to his creation is obvious from the very first revelations of himself to his creations. Second, generosity is an area where even those who love God the most deeply move away from his clear

teachings. Since the research is intended to learn if these five Churches of God of Prophecy in central Kentucky demonstrate any indication of having veered in ways similar to the kingdom's past experience, the research must first sample the area in question before taking any further steps. A focus group is clearly the most efficient and accurate way to obtain a clear summary prior to sampling the region more deeply or to intervening in an attempt to resolve the concern. A focus group enables me to demonstrate if concern is appropriate and, if so, where the concern should be focused.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Problem and Purpose

The message taught by the world today hinders the church's mission to care for those who struggle to survive in this world. Further, the use of the phrase *struggle to survive* requires the church to look beyond mere monetary struggles and into the those struggles that arise, not from lack of monetary resources but from the possession of monetary resources in excess of the owners' understanding of their own needs. Coupled with those dominated by greed, who know no such boundaries, the church itself struggles to love as Jesus commanded: "pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap" (Luke 6:38b). Scripture is unclear whether God wants to give prosperity in measure with the generosity of the giver or in measure with the receiver's ability to accept it wisely. The tension among aggressive givers seeking prosperity, those who are so uncertain of how to steward wealth that they do nothing, and those who believe themselves radically called to give it all away, focuses the church inward on itself instead of outward toward those most needing its care.

The purpose of this project was to explore the current understanding and practice of biblical generosity and abundance, as compared to charity and prosperity, within congregations of the Church of God of Prophecy in central Kentucky. This project demonstrates the linkage between the fruit of generosity and the kingdom attribute of abundance. It further establishes how generosity functions as a response, one that may result in still greater abundance to be differentiated from an intentional act of charity performed with the preset goal of obtaining prosperity from a God bound by his

promises. The research explored the current understanding and practice of biblical generosity and abundance, as compared to charity and prosperity, within congregations of the Church of God of Prophecy in central Kentucky.

Research Questions

The goal of this project was to categorize and process the biblical concept of generosity as understood by Christians today, using the sample from central Kentucky. Furthermore, it intended to compare the sample's understanding and practice of prosperity/abundance with the stated beliefs of the Church of God of Cleveland, Tennessee, as found in its *Ministry Policy Manual* (Hamby), statements found on its Web site, a report given by the Bishop Gary Smith of Kentucky, and those beliefs found in Scripture. The questions that sought to categorize these goals do not begin to cover the entire gamut of documentation used to inspire the reasoning behind the pastors' and church leaders' responses, nor were these questions intended to do so.

Research Question #1

What is the understanding and practice of generosity in the Church of God of Prophecy in central Kentucky?

This question sought to learn how members of the Church of God of Prophecy in central Kentucky understand and practice generosity, seeking to determine whether the practice and experience of generosity was consistent with the beliefs shared by the members of the surveyed churches. Observations from the interviewer's journal provided additional qualitative data for analysis.

Research Question #2

What is the understanding and practice of abundance in the Church of God of Prophecy in central Kentucky?

This question sought to learn how members of the Church of God of Prophecy in central Kentucky understand and practice abundance, seeking to determine if the practice and experience of abundance was consistent with the beliefs shared by the members of surveyed churches. Observations from the interviewer's journal provided additional qualitative data for analysis.

Research Question #3

How do these understandings and practices of generosity and abundance inform the view and understanding of charity and prosperity for Christians in the Church of God of Prophecy in central Kentucky?

This question intended to distill the degree to which the members of the Church of God of Prophecy in central Kentucky experience and adapt to the consistencies and inconsistencies of both their understanding of each term and their experience of each term.

Population and Participants

In order to focus the research on an identifiable geographical and social region within the worldwide membership of the Church of God of Prophecy, I decided to focus on an area of the United States known as central Kentucky. The study expected to interview the pastors as well as six or seven active members serving each of the five Church of God of Prophecy congregations located in central Kentucky, identified as the following counties: Adair, Anderson, Barren, Bourbon, Boyle, Casey, Clark, Fayette,

Franklin, Garrard, Greer, Harrison, Hart, Jessamine, LaRue, Lincoln, Madison, Marion, Metcalf, Montgomery, Mercer, Nelson, Nicholas, Powell, Pulaski, Russell, Scott, Shelby, Spencer, Taylor, Washington, and Woodford. The five churches are identified simply by number and letter with pastors distinguished by their church's overall number and the letter *a*, and long-term or key members by the corresponding number and letters (e.g., b, c, d). A pastor might be identified as 1a.

Design of the Study

The research was entirely qualitative. It involved an initial meeting with the pastors of each local church in central Kentucky followed by focus groups made up from leading members of these local churches and their pastors. The focus groups featured the questions described previously.

In order to facilitate the audio/video recording of each session, the focus group took place in a smaller room inside the church itself, sometimes a Sunday school room or a parlor. The participants' chairs were arranged facing the camera, in a modified semi-circle. I sat facing the participants, my back to the camera. I had the questions and prompts printed with pen and notebook in hand.

The questions were approved by Bishop Gary Smith, State Overseer of Kentucky. Each pastor received a short briefing explaining the purpose of the study and the overall trend the questions of the protocol would follow. A period of ninety minutes was requested from each focus group.

Morgan discusses the challenges of using focus groups to conduct quality research featuring an expected level of reliability and validity. He notes a general concern among researchers about the need to standardize the quality of the research by

establishing a consistent, systematic, and methodical approach to their underlying structures and to the procedures routinely to be followed. The groups with which he worked determined the most valid criticisms from researchers concentrating on quantitative research centered around questions of reliability and validity. Nevertheless, he also noted that those researchers whose concentrations were in qualitative research might not welcome an overemphasis in standardizations normally associated with these two areas. Morgan proposed using trustworthiness as opposed to validity in measuring the quality of work resulting from research using focus groups (*Successful Focus Groups* 227-28).

Validity, or trustworthiness, answers the simple question, “[D]oes the research measure what it claims to measure?” (Sensing 42). Since this research asked participants to describe and discuss the topics of the protocol’s questions from their own experience and beliefs, only outright trickery or complete misunderstanding could render any answer invalid. Validity, then, required careful observation and analysis on my part to measure the results obtained properly.

Triangulation allows qualitative researchers to determine the consistency of their research by measuring the frequency with which similar concepts and ideas emerge from differing sources (Sensing 72-73). Triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods, data sources, researchers, or tools in qualitative research to determine the reliability of the research itself and its findings (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, and Neville. 545). This project used multiple data sources, the number of participants and the correlation of their responses, to determine the truthfulness of the project.

To measure the degree of triangulation, Appendix A, B, and C contain tables reflecting the various responses anticipated before actually conducting the focus groups. They also contain reactions received that were not expected. Compiled together, they demonstrate both highly common as well as extremely disparate answers discovered during the research.

Another key measure of reliability and trustworthiness was the conduct of each focus group. The focus group interview protocol provides a simple format that was followed in every church with every focus group (see Appendix B). The project measured three of the twelve Church of God of Prophecy churches located in central Kentucky, a typical response based on the total number of churches approached. Only the passage of time and the acquisition of additional knowledge or experience would be likely to alter the results of the work.

In order to enhance validity, comments and themes were measured to determine whether or not they possess simple face validity. Walter Shewring notes that the face validity of questions asked may affect the participants' willingness to consider questions seriously or even at all. If questions appear pointless or absurd, participants may give quick and shallow responses, preventing the research from addressing the areas of concern in any meaningful way (356).

Data Collection

Data collection will require, first, approval from Bishop Smith of the questions to be asked in each focus group. His approval was obtained before the project's hearing the week of 24 April 2017. After approval from the bishop was obtained, appointments were made with each church involved. Each focus group was conducted between 1 June and

26 July 2017. Each focus group followed precisely the focus group interview protocol in Appendix B, including completing the informed consent letter (see Appendix A). The same video camera recorded each session.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was comprised of two processes, both highly qualitative. First I analyzed the notes and audio/videos from each focus group and completed an Excel chart to triangulate every response. Then each anticipated response and emerging theme was analyzed for the manner in which the information was presented by the particular participant, looking for clues from body language and tone of voice to indicate underlying and unacknowledged confirming or contradicting information. After each participant's response and participation was similarly analyzed, the results were compiled to determine overall trends in each church and an overall trend for the central Kentucky area as a whole. Once these responses were compiled and sorted according to the trends they represented, they were arranged into the tables found in Appendixes C, D, and E. Removing my own thinking from the analysis was crucial to the research in order to evaluate only the participants' responses. The results were derived entirely on the participants' accounts.

Ethical Procedures

My primary tools to ensure proper ethical procedures were followed consisted of the approved informed consent letter (see Appendix A) signed by each participant and the manner whereby the confidentiality of the data obtained was safeguarded. The informed consent letter ensured that the participant was a willing part of the focus group and

understood the purpose of the group. No one participated in the study without having first signed the letter.

Additionally, the storage and security of the data and the materials used to gather it was fully safeguarded. All records, written or audio/video were kept under lock, and I am the only person with access. Whether in publications or conversations, Bible studies or sermons, I will discuss only that aggregating data obtained consequent to the entire study and never detailed information that might identify a specific church or participant. Identifying information may be illustrated by using expressions such as *a member of one of the churches said* or *the majority of the churches studied*.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Problem and Purpose

Scripture records demonstrations of God's generosity toward his creation starting from the earliest moments of its conception. From the third day of God's work, when grass and herbs brought forth seed and trees brought forth fruit, Scripture proclaims he declared what he saw was good. God generously created the universe in which humanity lives. He filled it with plants and animals of every kind, all of whom reproduce after their own kind. These plants and animals did not reproduce in miserly fashion either, but with great abundance, more than is needed, enough to share, enough to become generous, like God. This abundance proved more than enough until sin entered the hearts of human beings. At that point, things changed. Instead of engaging "in self-control for the sake of others" (Reese, 2 *Peter* 207), humanity schemed to satisfy its own greedy desires, desires "directed first and foremost at an object or goal other than Jesus" (203). In Chapter 4, I explore the manner whereby the focus groups held in each of the Church of God churches responded to the discussions on generosity, abundance, and contentment.

The Church of God of Prophecy in central Kentucky strives to resolve these issues wisely in harmony with the scriptural interpretation already cited (Smith). The people there work hard in support of both state and international goals. The purpose of this project was to explore the current understanding and practice of biblical generosity and abundance, as compared to charity and prosperity, within congregations of the Church of God of Prophecy in central Kentucky. An exploratory, focus group research

model was used to facilitate the process of gathering the desired information. The focus groups were held on the campuses of each church involved.

Participants

Three congregations from the Church of God of Prophecy in central Kentucky participated in the research study. The three congregations provided fourteen total members for the study. The participants were all Caucasians. One pastor participated. One participant had less than five years active participation in the local church. One had more than five but less than ten years. The other twelve had all been members for ten years or more. The participants' ages may be grouped in fifteen-year segments (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1. Participant Ages

Age Group	N
Under18	0
18-30	0
31-45	3
45-60	4
Over 60	7

Research Question #1

The first research question was, "What is the understanding and practice of generosity in the Church of God of Prophecy in central Kentucky?" Appendix C reports the responses received, categorized by a positive or negative view of generosity.

The members were asked to address the grounds for their understanding and practice of generosity based on specific biblical knowledge, pastoral teaching and

preaching, doctrinal understandings, and their interactions with the world around them. Their comments regarding doctrinal/denominational understandings simply made clear that they saw no difference in what they had learned from Scripture, their pastors, or their denomination. In one church, the members even commented that they expected them all to be the same. In regard to influences from the surrounding world, they did not reveal any large or especially significant worldly influences in their responses to the questions asked or to the surrounding conversations that arose from the questions asked. The best way to describe the difference would be to see the difference as aspirational values versus lived, practical values.

Appendix C provides a more specific breakdown of the responses received on generosity. Those labeled *Many Members/Longer Discussion* indicate lively discussions involving a majority of each group that took place on these responses. Those labeled *Fewer Members/Longer Discussions* indicate lively discussions involving fewer members, while the label *Fewer Members/Little Discussion* indicates a topic where only a few brief comments were made by one or two members. This label does not indicate the level of energy shared in the discussion or the comment.

Almost all members answered with comments indicating a desire to “meet the needs of others” (fourteen). Only one member of the largest group, the one with six people in it, did not specifically use this phrase in her or his comments, but this person did address helping people who have had their homes burned or who have been very sick, issues address by many participants.

When prompted to share more about their initial comments, the members who responded replied with stories from Scripture (two) or stories from real-life experience

(six). These stories included one about a sharing interaction that involved taking a homeless man met in Las Vegas to a McDonald's and spending hours simply talking to him after everyone had eaten. Other stories involved helping burned-out families or those needing serious medical care (eight). One story involved a person seeking help who initially requested an offer to work for food but then turned down the offer when it was made. Interestingly, the people from this church as a group discussed their hope this person might experience a change of heart if they kept reaching out to the one asking for work (four). No member of this group offered any sense of resistance or reluctance indicating they would not continue to reach out to the man at every opportunity.

In one church, four people commented they believed God intended for them to share everything the recipients of their generosity might need, if available or attainable, when they invited people into their homes or their fellowship in order to meet those needs. This group also discussed methods they might use to involve the people invited in activities other than simple handouts. One story involved a man determined to work for the food and money he needed. This group invited the entire family to a Sunday potluck and offered to wash dishes with the man afterward so that the meal would not seem to be a handout.

Expressing a similar sentiment, one member from another church emphasized the need to surround giving with prayer, particularly the laying on of hands, in order to free those wanting to help the person in need as much as possible (three). In one church, this conversation took a turn toward giving things other than money and focused on the joy of growing things for the intent of giving them away, which then moved into a similar understanding of work in general (three people).

Research Question #2

The second research question was, “What is the understanding and practice of abundance in the Church of God of Prophecy in central Kentucky?” Appendix D reports the responses received, categorized by a positive or negative view of abundance.

As in Research Question #1, the members were asked to respond based on specific biblical knowledge, pastoral teaching and preaching, doctrinal understandings, and their interactions with the world around them. As before, they made no distinction among Scripture, pastor, or denomination though their lived, practical values differed to a greater degree from their aspiration beliefs and understanding. Appendix D offers a more detailed breakdown of the responses shared by the members. The same categories of *Many Members/Longer Discussion*, *Fewer Members/Longer Discussion*, and *Fewer Members/Little Discussion* apply. Enthusiasm and energy should not be equated with the label *Fewer Members/Little Discussion*.

When presented with the topic of abundance, each group immediately started discussing the concept *you cannot outgive God* with 100 percent participation (fourteen). These three discussions, however, took two slightly different perspectives. In one church, all the members agreed with the aphorism only because of God’s generosity. Their descriptions aligned with Jesus’ words in Luke 6:38. They were very quick to point out in their discussion that giving did not create an obligation for God to meet. They identified God’s response as being entirely of his own initiative, not because someone gave, meaning he had to give back, too. The other two churches began their discussion as though the adage were a law established by God. In both of the churches that addressed this adage as though it were a law, other members added their insights about the

importance of recognizing that God always gave back more because of his mercy and grace and because he wanted to encourage those who appreciate his generosity themselves to be more generous from their own abundance. No one disagreed, but the difference in starting points, while small, must be noted as indicative of an outside influencer, perhaps even a trace of the *prosperity gospel's law of returns* (Bowler 96). If this were the source, the members present in the focus group did not indicate they considered it a pathway to riches.

Each church also understood abundance as more than is actually needed. Most members described experiences with unexpected abundance, but members did not offer any indication they thought themselves blessed with abundance far beyond their needs. Nevertheless, only two people addressed the issue of meager abundance. Both of them described the need for Christians to give as they were able, regardless of their degree of abundance. All three groups were clear about the need to respond to abundance with small, though distinct differences.

In one church, the consensus among the group focused on need rather than the ability to meet the need. Their discussions focused on their response as led by God and not on their existing ability to meet the need nor on the long-term impact their response might have. Instead they were focused on need-based response, including for poverty. The question of money versus goods never arose.

Another church focused on both need and abundance. This discussion addressed methods by which need might be met as well as the importance of meeting those needs as they appeared. They discussed meeting the needs of burned-out families and those with serious illness as opposed to meeting the simple day-to-day wants others in the

community might have. They described times they used cash, but they spent as much time discussing situations where they provided specifically what those in need lacked as any other remedy to their situation.

One church spent very little time addressing financial solutions to the problems of the needy in their community so much as meeting the specific need. They discussed earlier responses to sickness, death, and other tragedies with little or no discussion about poverty in their community. However, this church planned a potluck dinner for a social action group within their community in conjunction with their annual support of the group's needs.

During this part of the discussions, three concepts emerged. At first, a few members discussed working where they were planted, using God's gifts to bless others around them, while praying and working to see their gifts grow and become an even greater blessing in their circumstances (three). Gifts of time and presence surfaced as part of this discussion. Members then commented on how God always seems to provide the needed strength and rest when giving time and presence to others, especially when the giver experienced stress and fatigue while sharing these gifts (six).

This discussion then moved on to considering the need to look beyond their earthly existence when examining the concept of abundance (six). They talked about the concepts of peace and rest, treasures in heaven, and the concept of life in paradise. Each church addressed these concepts from their own unique perspective, but when this discussion emerged, the discussion moved toward eternal life with Christ, what it would be like, and how they would experience it.

Two churches discussed the need to share abundance with others and not hoard it (three). These two churches also discussed how they believed themselves to be blessed even more when they gave beyond their tithe (six). Those members who addressed tithing were clear in their belief that God expected them to tithe a minimum of 10 percent. Those members who shared their beliefs concerning prayer as the primary pathway for understanding God's will for their abundance addressed the importance of vigorously following God's guidance (six). This discussion emphasized the importance of the gift of discernment. Even those who did not comment nodded in agreement, supporting the conclusion these two churches see tithes as required and offerings as going beyond the tithe as led by God. Only two members discussed concerns about the deserving poor during this part of the focus group and that only in terms of the hard work required to acquire an abundance and the importance of stewardship.

At one point, members of one church began discussing the temptations created by abundance (two). One member commented how his or her abundance had enabled her or him to obtain things normally out of reach more easily and how having more than normal created a desire to acquire still more. This member then offered further details showing how overtime became enjoyable time because of the "more money" it provided. She or he explained the wasted use of some of these things when obtained and expressed regret over the long-term consequences that use produced. Another church discussed a similar point but emphasized the wasted blessing (four). Two members described feeling overwhelmed by the size of the tithe they felt constrained to pay as their income grew and the need to become comfortable while giving the increased tithe. These two members shared a concern that the churches of their youth had not prepared them for this

adjustment. Their comments demonstrated their belief that they might have responded more appropriately if they had been better informed.

One church discussed the story of the rich, young ruler at length. They expressed concern that people who relied entirely on unearned wealth never appreciate in full the work required by the one who first attained it (two). Furthermore, they shared their concerns that those receiving such blessings might not see them as a blessing and fail to gain an insight into how their blessings can become blessings to others. Again, members expressed their concern about properly training youth to handle abundance should they obtain it.

This church also discussed the parable of the laborers in the vineyard. They examined two issues primarily. First, they considered how the laborers' human sense of fairness blinded them from appreciating how the landowner had met their stated needs, whether they started early or late. The issue of fairness was reviewed at length, ranging from the need to recognize abundance as family, friends, food, shelter, even moments of pure joy to the question of whether latecomers should be paid the same when they worked so much less than those who started first.

The members of this church agreed that from a kingdom perspective the issue was the abundance each laborer received, not the amount of time each laborer worked (two). Fairness, they agreed, can deceive and trick people into focusing on unimportant issues. They noted no one left home looking for eight hours of work. Instead each laborer sought a day's wage. Since every laborer received what he or she sought to obtain, members shared, his or her thankfulness should be focused on the blessing received not on the effort to attain it. Instead, members shared their beliefs that the laborers' sense of fairness

diverted them from their original purpose, deceiving them into placing a secondary issue ahead of their initial goal, which was to earn a day's wage. The members decided that the workers' wrongly focused worries about fairness led them to feel badly used by the landowner.

Research Question #3

The final research question was, "How do these understandings and practices of generosity and abundance inform the view and understanding of charity and prosperity for Christians in the Church of God of Prophecy in central Kentucky?" Appendix E reports the responses received, categorized by a positive or negative view of abundance and generosity.

In order to answer this question, the focus groups were asked to discuss three additional topics. The first of these three topics was charity, the second was prosperity, and the third asked them specifically to describe how charity and abundance informed the view and practice of generosity and abundance in the Churches of God of Prophecy in central Kentucky.

The goal of Research Question #3 was to gather information on how the participants would consider their understandings and practices of charity and prosperity in the context of their responses to their discussions of generosity and abundance. In particular, the final three questions put to the focus groups were designed to reveal what, if any, additional information might be forthcoming. The project sought to discover how these churches understood generosity and abundance and to determine if addressing the concepts of charity and prosperity had any measurable effect on their initial responses.

Due to the nature of this discussion, in that the members were refining their comments on generosity and abundance based on charity and prosperity with an emphasis on experience, fewer people talked than did in response to questions 1 and 2. This difference necessitated adjusting the break points among the three categories separating the points of discussion from each other. The following breakdown allows each category to be kept in the same perspective, even though fewer members participated in the discussion than did in the earlier two discussions. Appendix E offers a more detailed breakdown of the responses shared by the members.

By the time the focus group reached Research Question #3, the few allusions to the prosperity gospel or to a sense of laws, rules, or promises uncovered in the first two questions indicated an insignificant likelihood of finding any meaningful references in the third. This anticipated result proved true. Research Question #3 had only one likely reference, “Charitable obedience brings Godly return,” and nothing this one person shared during the group’s earlier discussions indicated a belief that charitable obedience obligated a response from God, simply that such obedience always resulted in a response from God. Only one person shared the thought.

Nevertheless, Research Question #3 did offer significant and interesting responses. Two churches responded, “Charity equals Love” (eight people). In the English-speaking congregations of the Church of God of Prophecy, the King James Version is considered the authoritative translation, even in churches that regularly use other Bible translations. Since the King James translates ἀγάπη as charity, this response certainly was no surprise.

In two churches, however, their additional comments on love served to open their conversations to further insights about righteous living. Their conversations strongly emphasized charity/love necessary to ensure that beliefs are not simply talk (five). One church energetically discussed love/charity as words demanding action. In the other church that addressed this issue, the member sharing it described specific actions this church took to connect with and give to those not yet a part of their congregation.

The collective responses of one church summed up their group's overall understanding of generosity, abundance, charity, and prosperity by noting these characteristics all flow from the love of God and the love of others. Based on the statements of this group, I concluded they believe Christians nurture in their hearts such an understanding (four). This group specifically addressed loving the unlovable (two) and the requirement for self-sacrifice and denial (two) and stressed the importance of each.

Another church discussed giving simply for joy of giving (three). They described experiences of paying the bill for the car behind them at McDonalds or paying the toll for the next car back when Kentucky had toll roads. During this conversation, the members emphasized the joy of surprising others with unexpected kindness or mercy.

One church spoke of prosperity as a consequence of work, not inheritance (one) and of skill, not luck (two). Their discussion seemed to indicate some viewed abundance as though the reason some had it and others did not might not be obvious, while prosperity's source would always be work. One member explained that prosperity demonstrated more about how excess had been handled than how it had been earned.

One member did disagree, using gold mines and oil wells to illustrate his or her point that prosperity could be the result of incredible luck or of tremendous blessing

(one). Her or his comments indicated a belief that such large windfalls would make a person prosperous. This individual never said these exact words but implied that abundance would constitute a lesser amount than prosperity.

Two churches described their experiences with giving to organized entities or institutions. They explained the frequency of phone calls and the callers' repeated inability to explain the use of the money they were seeking (eight). They added their belief in the need for the gift of discernment in order to determine whether to support these institutions (five). A few noted their belief that giving to institutions constituted charity while giving to individuals and families represented generosity (three). Some members discussed the need to give for God's glory as the motivating reason, regardless of the recipient (two).

Finally, in one church two people addressed the passage from 3 John 2: "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth" (KJV). They discussed their belief that this passage summed up for them God's intentions for his children and how the focus group had covered their experiences and understandings of the questions they had considered.

Summary of Major Findings

These focus groups conducted in three Church of God of Prophecy churches located in central Kentucky produced the following major findings:

1. Theological alignment among local church preaching, denominational teaching, and respondents' biblical understanding of generosity and abundance;
2. Joyful interaction between giver and recipient fundamental to practicing scriptural generosity;

3. Abundance, large or small, celebrated and shared confidently.
4. The struggle with flawed institutions and imperfect experiences while striving to live out love without sacrificing integrity; and,
5. Prosperity and abundance as gifts from God.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Major Findings

Concerns over the roles of generosity and abundance, living in the kingdom according to its creator's desires, have seized the attention of God's children for as long as the Bible has recorded history. No doubt Cain felt some slight sense of gratitude for God's abundant harvest when he offered less than the best of his crops for the sacrifice as found in Genesis 4:8 and elaborated upon further in Hebrews 11:4. Of course, even Jude used Cain as an archetype to describe how unrighteousness, arising from the greed that ruled his heart, overshadowing any desire to practice generosity (Waltke 371-72). The project uncovered five key findings.

Theological Alignment among Local Church Preaching, Denominational Teaching and Respondents' Biblical Understanding of Generosity and Abundance

Scripture forms the basis of identity for the Church of God of Prophecy in central Kentucky and throughout the world. This belief has been true since its founding and remains true today ("Doctrine").

Personal Observation. Scripture remains the primary source of guidance for members of the Churches of God of Prophecy in central Kentucky. This reliance is not surprising. The church re-affirmed its vision for the 99th International Assembly in July 2016:

We believe that the Bible—both Old and New Testaments—is the inspired Word of God. The Bible is God's revelation of Himself and His will to humankind, sufficient for instruction in salvation and daily Christian living. The Bible is the Christian's rule of faith and practice. ("Statement of Faith")

The use of two words, *sufficient* and *rule*, succinctly sum up the teachings set forth by Church of God of Prophecy. Kentucky churches, including those in central Kentucky, strive to emulate these teachings as closely as possible. In consequence, members of the churches in central Kentucky expect all literature, Bible studies, and any other handouts, guides, fliers, or banners designed to assist them in living out their beliefs to conform with Scripture. Any variation or change would need to be discussed at length before alterations in interpretation might be accepted. At this time, no detectable efforts can be identified in Kentucky to challenge their traditional interpretations.

As a clergy member for the last six years, I have observed that the denomination resists many unorthodox higher critical approaches to biblical interpretation but embraces solid evangelical and/or time-tested orthodox insights that aide the church's overall understanding of the will of God. The denomination approaches Scripture conservatively but with an eager desire to learn. Nevertheless, as a former elder and full member of the Kentucky Conference of the United Methodist Church, I saw the consequences of allowing biblical interpretation to depend excessively upon church leaders and scholars.

Whether in the actual churches where I met with the focus groups or at the 2017 Kentucky State Convention in July, the members of the church continue to display a firm commitment to scriptural authority. Because of my personal experience with the denomination's interactions with the Holy Spirit, I believe it strongly relies Paul's teaching found in 1 Corinthians 14:8-9, as well as other Scriptures that emphasize the need to be orderly and understandable, especially to people new to the church. In my experience, in Kentucky, the members of the Church of God of Prophecy believe intense

dependence upon Scripture is the best way to ensure that everyone, no matter one's degree of spiritual growth, understands their teaching and preaching.

Literature review. From the time Moses climbed Mt. Sinai to receive the law from God, Scripture, either oral or written, has been God's tool for revealing the specific details of his plan for reconfirming humanity into his image, via his son, Jesus Christ (Joslyn-Siemiatkoski 453, 455). The Church of God of Prophecy accepts the authority of Scripture without reservation ("FAQ"). Further, A. J. Tomlinson, the founder of the Church of God of Prophecy, throughout his ministry emphasized "the Word of God as our only rule of faith and practice" (Tomlinson and Tomlinson 91). Only the pastor who participated in the study indicated any familiarity with the denomination's Web sites, but no basis exists to exclude the Web site's use by others. Based on the focus groups' own emphases and the stories the members told, Scripture, wherever found, is the primary tool used to obtain and understand God's general will for them while on earth.

Biblical. The purpose of this project was to explore the current understanding and practice of biblical generosity and abundance, as compared to charity and prosperity, within congregations of the Church of God of Prophecy in central Kentucky. The project determined the degree of reliance, as understood by the members, placed by these churches on Scripture with a strong emphasis on the King James Version of the Bible. The theological framework of this project was designed to clarify God's written intent from the inaccurate portrayals of this intent by proponents of the prosperity gospel. The trust and confidence of the members in Scripture, with the KJV as their foundational document, demonstrates the importance of becoming deeply immersed in that word in order to avoid the pitfalls of selective exegesis.

These participants in the focus groups are very comfortable in Scripture. Each group had scriptural illustrations for virtually every question or prompt made. One group in particular elaborated on one another's comments freely and in such a way that the intensity of their fellowship stood out as a model to others. This group frequently rephrased one another's comments enlarging upon them or restricting them according to their particular understanding, but never in a way that increased tension or added strain to the group. In fact, their enlargements and comments served to gain greater agreement. Each group could be lined up on a scale of openness, but they were all focused and scripturally minded with their comments. I have concluded their reliance on one translation, the KJV, as authoritative helped this process.

As a result, their understanding as instruments blessed by God to bless others came through clearly in their discussions. Each group discussed their intent to follow the instruction giving in Romans 12:8. Louw and Nida translate the word ἀπλότης as “generosity, liberality, to act in a generous manner” and then cite Romans 12:8b: “the person who shares should do it generously” (57.106). One group even went so far as to describe giving “all that you have” in the context of the rich ruler described in Luke 18:22 as the basis of their understanding to give without holding back (Johnson 287).

Another group described giving out of limited abundance. Even though they focused their discussion on in-kind giving, the emphasis was upon giving, not keeping. The Bible has numerous examples of in-kind giving, but two come quickly to mind. In 1 Kings 17:8-24, Scripture tells the story of Elijah, the widow, and her son. Not only does the widow feed the three of them for many days, but “[t]here was always enough flour and olive oil left in the containers, just as the Lord had promised through Elijah” (vs. 16).

The other story involves Peter and John leaving the Temple in Acts 3:2. In this case, the in-kind giving involved the use of spiritual gifts, not material ones. Nevertheless, the lame man got up and walked.

Informs practice. Recognizing the denomination's strong emphasis on the KJV and lesser interest in scholarly insight than in applied Scripture, every effort to help these churches grow in their understanding of generosity and abundance, as opposed to charity and prosperity, will have to be based wholly on accessible, lay-level understandings of Scripture. The literature review demonstrates the strong kingdom link, even synonymy, between righteousness and generosity. Nevertheless, the methods used in the literature review to clarify this connection will not work with the laity, nor even some pastors, in the Church of God of Prophecy churches in central Kentucky. The insights and connections chosen to illustrate this link will have to come out of experience in such a way as to be confirmed by Scripture, King James Scripture, for the greatest and deepest impact in these churches.

First, the Church of God of Prophecy in Kentucky and in North America will need to explore which supportive experiences can be most easily connected to Scripture as it is found in the KJV. This exploration should resolve quickly. Next, the church's leadership will need to identify experiences that naturally build upon one another, so that the Scripture that obviously connects can be logically extended to the second-level of experience. The leadership will need to be prepared to discuss these relationships between Scripture and experience lovingly and to do so with a very high level of transparency in order for the connecting process chosen to be understood and confirmed. Leadership also needs to be ready to apologize and back away quickly if the connection

of the second-level experience to Scripture does not hold up in the minds of the people. The church will want to emphasize the needs of the human recipients of these insights and not the needs of the individuals who share them.

This need will require regular evaluation at a regional or national level in order that any disconnects might be quickly uncovered, acknowledged, and remedied. Finally, the leadership must be ready to spend the time required to succeed. This project cannot currently estimate the amount of time needed, but it will be measured in years, not months.

Joyful Interaction between Giver and Recipient Fundamental to Practicing Scriptural Generosity

In his article, Paul Holt succinctly sums up the traditional understanding of the Church of God of Prophecy regarding the proper use of money as stewards of God: “You cannot pursue holiness without coming face to face with your faithfulness as a steward” (8). I have been blessed to witness this generosity time and again while a pastor in the Church of God of Prophecy and while attending its various functions. Whether watching a church joyfully providing school supplies at a local laundromat while simultaneously feeding all comers or being encouraged and empowered to take food, water, and the Word to that same laundromat on Sundays, this church loves to give.

Personal observation. On my very first visit to one of the congregations, I ran into the youth director and her assistants getting ready for their Wednesday night youth meeting. I was immediately offered something to drink and made to feel very welcome. They even offered me work.

This experience repeated itself in one way or another at every church I attended while conducting these focus groups. One gave me tomatoes while another prayed for me and anointed me with oil. The members were happy, smiling, and glad to be participants in this project. They enjoyed discussing the concepts of generosity, abundance, charity, and prosperity. They were engaged.

This pattern of behavior continued throughout the entire process, especially during the focus groups themselves. Each group and each member expressed strong feelings about the importance of helping those in need, citing both Scripture and personal experience. I heard the story of the rich young ruler (Matt. 19:16-30), the story of the laborers in the vineyard (Matt. 21:1-16), and the “least of these” (Matt. 25:31-46) as support for the stories about paying hospital bills for the sick, refurnishing a burned-out home, and making sure children had the school supplies needed for the beginning of the school year.

During our discussions, every church had stories to tell. One illustrated an understanding that the generous witness does more than simply give *stuff* and leave. Instead, generous Christians stand alongside those who receive little respect, not only feeding them but listening to them. They ensure the needy eat while feeding them the with their time and attention, proving all people are important to God and his children.

Significantly, I noted that even those who had reservations about whether those they helped would respond wisely or foolishly, they still wanted to give. They believed giving was their privilege, not merely a duty, to support those in need. This core belief validates the idea that elaborating and unfolding those Scriptures that depict God pouring

out blessings on undeserving people might gently encourage these churches and others in Kentucky to distinguish lovingly between empowerment and enabling.

I also noticed concerns about stewardship. Some of these concerns appear to derive from a misapplication of the Protestant work ethic, as well a failure to interpret 2 Thessalonians 3:10 in terms of 2 Corinthians 8:13-15. No doubt Paul's discussion in 2 Corinthians about the collection was influenced by the same thinking that led to his admonitions in 2 Thessalonians. His obvious concern was that Christians set good examples in their concern for one another, whether they were the ones giving or the ones receiving. Throughout my association with the Church of God of Prophecy in Kentucky, their desire to share has never come into question.

Literature review. The result of the research demonstrated the predisposition of these three churches to act in agreement with the definition of *generosity* previously supplied. The desire to put others' needs ahead of their own was clearly shown in the research. Each group demonstrated confidence in God's ability and God's intent to provide all they needed to be radically generous to others (Reese 2 *Peter* 207).

The Greek word δικαιοσύνης expresses their desire and their confusion very clearly. Louw and Nida define δικαιοσύνης as "[t]he act of doing what God requires." Since 2 Corinthians 9:9-11 in the New Living Translation translates γενήματα τῆς δικαιοσύνης ὑμῶν specifically as "a great harvest of generosity in you" then generosity would be understood as the righteousness God seeks to develop in humanity as people learn to trust him more deeply.

As noted, the people of the three churches have no doubts about God's command to love one another and how generosity is the active demonstration of love; nevertheless,

they are concerned about enabling others by giving too much to people who would use to harm themselves or others by not using their gifts as God requires. They want to be generous for the sake of the others yet be careful not to make bad matters worse for the very same reason (Reese 2 *Peter* 203). Some members are struggling unawares with the Protestant work ethic as the defining point in the spectrum between helping and enabling. Still, this insight is actually good news since this awareness will provide an excellent location to begin opening up the churches so they can experience still more of the heart of God.

Biblical. In order to build a strong basis for his teaching about generosity in general and the offering specifically, Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 9:9-11 words of both comfort and encouragement:

As the Scriptures say, “They share freely and give generously to the poor. Their good deeds will be remembered forever.” For God is the one who provides seed for the farmer and then bread to eat. In the same way, he will provide and increase your resources and then produce a great harvest of generosity in you. Yes, you will be enriched in every way so that you can always be generous. And when we take your gifts to those who need them, they will thank God.

Just as the project confirms the innate generosity of the people of the Church of God of Prophecy in central Kentucky, it also confirms the readiness of these same people to gain new insights into the methods and means of response available for them to use. As demonstrably generous people, they naturally follow the pathways of δικαιοσύνης laid out in Scripture. They desire to love others actively, providing relief for those who suffer and empowering change in themselves and those surrounding them. They recognize themselves as members of the community of God and want to share the fullness of that community with others.

In Second Corinthians 9.11 Paul encouraged giving by reminding the givers that one benefit to generosity is the praise God receives from its recipients. These three churches already know many ways to participate in good deeds of love, just as the Corinthians did with Paul. These methods they know they can share while learning even more ways to accomplish God's purposes.

Informs practice. Recognizing the abundant generosity extant in the congregations of the Churches of God of Prophecy in central Kentucky enables pastors and other church leaders to nurture the desires of the members of these congregations while using those same skills and desires to build still more disciples with similar yearnings. This nurturing accomplishes two simple goals related to generosity and abundance in the kingdom.

First, this recognition allows church leaders to transform the structures from an assembly building into a launching pad. This claim is metaphorical but true. Many churches seek to gather people into their buildings in order to do ministry. No doubt large numbers of church members have moved past that stage. Nevertheless, those members who have not need biblically-based encouragement. In consequence, many churches are still inwardly focused instead of outwardly focused. They hold the evangelical ministries inside their buildings. They teach and preach inside their buildings. To the outside world, the church is the building.

Second, by transforming the church's buildings into sites for planning and worship, this propensity can be easily transformed. As individual churches mobilize themselves within their walls during worship, Bible study, and other gatherings, they will become comfortable deploying into locations within the community where those targeted

by the specific ministry activity in which the church chooses to engage actually spend the most time. The congregations would plan inside their buildings but minister among the people. Churches would still worship in their buildings, but some would intentionally celebrate and worship in other locations, too.

Bible studies would become planning meetings, with a definite beginning and ending point. As the churches develop their skills, Bible studies will be running simultaneously, but those involved in each study would have a specific activity to be performed in the community. Churches will experience overlap. If these activities require an indoor location, churches will locate others in the area the church wishes to serve and hold these activities there.

Acknowledging that central Kentucky churches are filled with people who want to be scripturally generous frees the *ekklesia* from excess worry about expenses. Very likely, the initial projects will resemble old-fashioned barn raisings. Everyone interested will have a job and a responsibility. Each will meet her or his responsibilities as she or he is able. As the Bible studies shape the planning, people interested in furthering the process will joyfully embrace their opportunities for fulfilling the process's demands for joyful interaction between the giver and the recipient while they continue practicing generosity. In the beginning, a goal is identified, not a resource. God provides and reveals resources as the planning proceeds.

Abundance, Large or Small, Celebrated and Shared Confidently.

From the first focus group onward, the members of the churches that participated demonstrated complete trust in God. Questions arose concerning various methods and

amounts of sharing abundance, but no one questioned the call or the joy of receiving and sharing God's gifts. The churches involved want to share their abundance.

Biblical. The aphorism one cannot outgive God creates concern when dealing with Christians whose level of theological sophistication remains uncertain. The law of return, at its most basic level, accurately describes God's relationship with creation (Bowler 96). The dilemma arises when describing the nature of the *return*. Jesus promised outrageous returns for those who give, (Luke 6:38). In discussing this promise, Luke Timothy Johnson notes, "The most thought-provoking proposition is that God uses as the measure for the response to humans the measure they use in their relations with each other" (116). Johnson continues to emphasize the passive nature of Jesus' declaration from the human perspective. The passive verbs *δοθήσεται*, *πεπιεσμένον*, *σεσαλευμένον*, and *ὑπερεκχυννόμενον* all represent God's choices, God's actions toward his creation. The human who gives cannot precipitate the response from God. God cannot be bribed. He controls the response, and he has decided to base the response on the standard set by the human when the humanly giving first began (113).

Literature review. God's rewards frequently dwarf the pittance contributed by the giving person. Scripture makes clear the attitude of the giver outweighs the gift itself and how an attitude that simply performs empty actions bereft of commitment as though these actions might manipulate God offends him deeply (Isa. 1:10-17).

Therein lies the concern. As long as giving remains an act of love, generosity and sacrifice have meaning (1 Cor. 13). As long as the giver does not demand a response on his or her own terms, the gift expresses love. When expectation motivates the gifts and

keeps a constant score, love dies. The law of return, while reflecting a basic truth, creates specific expectations by emphasizing the return instead of the gift.

Scripture makes clear, however, that the one who has been forgiven much loves much (Luke 7:47). The key to a proper perspective for responding to God with radical generosity lies in one's state of mind. When God saves people, they are reborn into new life (2 Cor. 5:17). God forgives their sins (Col. 3:13b). They learn to love, cease demanding their own way, and give without expectation. Their hearts and not merely their actions change. They experience *μετάνοια* (Louw and Nida 41.52).

Expectations cannot hide. They become blatant in the words of the givers. When givers discuss the gift or the return, they demonstrate their expectations. When they neither discuss the gift nor measure the return but lift up their hopes for the recipient instead, then they act in love.

Personal observation. With great joy, I can say I heard very little discussion of the gift or its return in these focus groups. The very statement that one cannot out give God demonstrates; however, that some remnant of expectations remain. Nevertheless, the insight must be shared that those expectations did not guide, much less dominate, the focus groups' discussions on generosity.

At this point, the differences between individual or group aspirations and attainments must be confessed. If anyone has completed her or his spiritual growth, that one is blessed indeed. What I witnessed were people deeply concerned about the material condition of the people among whom they lived. This concern was seen in all three focus groups. What I witnessed was three groups of people struggling against a world that

teaches material success and *having it all* are primary cultural values. What I witnessed was the determination behind that struggle not to be of the world.

Based on stories told, each focus group believed in the importance of obeying the commandments to love God and their neighbors. For the most part, they understood that God gives rain to the just and the unjust (Matt. 5:43c) and recognized the need to be generous to everyone around them. Nevertheless, comments made regarding work, discernment, and deserving indicate these areas should receive attention and be addressed in Bible studies, if for no other reason than to offer clarity and peace to those seeking them.

For example, the Bible uses the word *discernment* to describe a spiritual gift. By definition, no spiritual gift can be bad, much less evil. In contrast, Paul reminds his readers to use their gifts for the betterment of one another, to build up the church (1 Cor. 14:12). Peter encourages his readers to do the same (1 Pet. 4:10). Paul intended to focus the Corinthians on the usage of spiritual gifts, not merely the possession (Fitzmeyer 515) while Peter desired the Gentile Christians he addressed, living in rural Asia Minor, to “serve (*diakoneo*) that gift ‘to one another’ and to do so as excellent stewards (*kaloï oikonomoi*) of God’s grace” (Donelson and Cox 9-10, 129-30). These insights demonstrate spiritual gifts, such as discernment, are to be used for the benefit of others, not for merely oneself.

When using the word *work* in 2 Thessalonians. 3:10, Paul’s primary intention is to emphasize the sin of idleness. The one who works is not idle. In contrast, the one who is idle creates problems and gives a bad witness to the non-Christians through dishonorable

meddling and/or returning to the client/patron model so inappropriate for Christians to adopt (Witherington *1 and 2 Thessalonians* 245-53).

Finally, God settled the question of *deserving* from the cross. No person or group of persons can brag they have a valid claim that God must honor (Rom. 3:9-20). All are beggars at the table of God. He chose to transform sinners into honored guests but only because it pleased him to do so (Luke 14:15-24).

After listening to the discussions during the different focus groups, no doubt remained of the members' intentions. They sincerely desired to share their blessings joyfully, to live as God desired, generously meeting the needs of others, living the righteous lives, and fulfilling God's expectations of them. They share the challenge common to all who love the Lord: "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect" (Rom. 12:2). The people who participated in the three focus groups were clearly convinced of the need to cooperate fully with God as he transformed their lives.

Informs practice. In consequence of the observations already made, the most transformative responses will follow the pattern previously described. The church must transform its buildings into launching pads for ministry. Whether visiting the lonely, feeding the hungry, or finding shelter for those without, the most significant impact on the church will be a continued call to turn itself outward toward people.

Since generosity's power shows most clearly where it is least likely to be found, the church must use its Bible studies to determine the where of generosity and the how. The church will also want to be aware of those times when the people toward whom they

seek to show the Lord's generosity desire nothing more than simply to come to church. This desire often appears in response to specific programs, things for which the church is well-known. Celebrating Christmas with songs and plays comes quickly to mind.

Still, the idea of doing God's work in the public square must take hold. As noted earlier, a successful plan will involve Bible studies designed to create action in the community and worship services intended to celebrate the blessings these activities bring. The churches will still need to go to hospitals, private and public homes, as well as the streets of their community. One enormous challenge will be encouraging those who go out taking action in the midst of world. Those not called to go out will want to encourage those who are. The church must become a genuine *koinonia*, two hands so tightly entwined no finger can move without all fingers sensing it.

The Struggle with Flawed Institutions and Imperfect Experiences While Striving to Live Out Love without Sacrificing Integrity

This finding involves effective action. The focus groups demonstrated that the churches are filled with a strong desire to be effective in doing something that will impact others' lives. Much of these discussions centered on helping those who need help in a very direct and personal manner. However, in spite of the recognized need to interact personally with the recipients of their generosity, the members recognized the need for ministry beyond their local community. Their concern lay in locating those who could be trusted to perform the actual ministry the churches and individuals felt called to support.

Personal observation. As noted earlier, everyone involved in the focus groups desired to help those in need. The Church of God of Prophecy in central Kentucky has settled this question in their heart and in their actions. The members sought guidance

which would enable them to become more successful in reaching out to those they did not know and could not see.

They noted their discomfort with many of the organizations seeking their donations while demonstrating their commitment to help those people they, the members, believe need help. One member shared a thirty-year commitment to an organization designed solely to help needy children, but not everyone enjoyed similar experiences or the same depth of knowledge. The local churches must meet the challenge of helping their members locate trustworthy organizations and find ways to ease the burden in giving to and supporting their work. The regional and denominational structures may be able to help by either creating such organizations or partnering with those that already exist. Addressing these concerns necessitates constant diligence.

Literature review. In today's world locating organizations that can be relied upon to use the funds entrusted to them in accord with the wishes of their donors has become extremely difficult. Many churches spend massive amounts of money to construct equally massive structures. At times, such ministry appears focused on the size and luxury of the operation at the expense of genuine need (Bowler 196-99).

Scripture teaches the opposite response. Second Corinthians 9:9-11 demonstrates another element of concern that stretches back to the earliest days of the church. Paul's two major concerns regarding the collection involved the spiritual growth of the donors and the relief of the recipients. He worried about gathering enough for the collection to accomplish its purpose and about those who had not given freely. He used the people and structures already at hand to gather and transport the collection, resulting in very little operational expenses.

From what can be learned, no one doubted how the collection would be used. Paul wisely involved people trusted by the churches in handling the collection, thus ensuring the donors' confidence it would be used for the reasons it was collected. His wisdom included sending Barnabas (Acts 11:30), the messengers chosen by the Corinthians (1 Cor. 16:3), and Titus, whom the Corinthians already trusted (2 Cor. 8:6). Activities intended to reassure people in such circumstances are rarely the case today, and their lack has become a major concern.

Informs practice. Addressing this concern would be another good use of the time churches spend in studying Scripture. The church can address two goals simultaneously. First, they can satisfy their concerns about how many needs they can handle and the order in which to meet them. One church may have one or two pressing concerns that are beyond the reach of the local church; others may have multitudes. Of importance, they select the ones they want to support. The topic will likely arise in the church again in the future, but for the moment, they choose as they are led by the Lord, anticipating further heavenly guidance when the issue arises again.

Next, they can create a plan for meeting the need(s) chosen. The Bible study can focus on determining which agencies can best be trusted. They may next choose which specific agency to support. After settling this issue, they can then determine how they raise the money, fill the shoeboxes, or donate clothing in order to accomplish their goal of generous giving to those in need lying beyond their immediate reach as a congregation.

The concept of gathering to plan, leaving to enact the plan, and returning to evaluate and celebrate the results certainly is not new. Nevertheless, without constant

focus, this concept descends back to set routines and people lose interest. Without intentional action, a church meets only the needs of insiders, at best. It often fails to meet even these needs.

The idea of building on known strengths to accomplish kingdom goals also is not new. The intentionality required to unleash the desire for joyful giving may be the missing piece for most churches. Providing that intentionality may allow the joy of abundance to find a way to circumvent the concerns over trust that may currently encumber the response of many in the church.

Prosperity and Abundance as Gifts from God

Gaining a clear understanding from the first four findings of the churches' desires to live and give according to the will of God enables the project to present this last finding as both a summation and a final segment of the project's successes. As noted in the first finding, the project learned that the churches of the Church of God of Prophecy in central Kentucky look to Scripture as their authority for understanding the will of God. This reliance on Scripture aligns them with the Church of God of Prophecy worldwide: "The Church of God of Prophecy believes the Bible, alone, is the infallible, inerrant, inspired Word of God. Because it is God's Word, it is the highest authority for belief and practice in all matters of faith" ("Statement of Faith"). Since Scripture speaks both plainly and authoritatively on generosity and contentment, sharing God's abundance and Christ's *koinonia* will flow naturally into these churches' plans and the plans of all churches located in Kentucky.

Further, the project learned these churches believe generosity to be a joyful process involving giving of every kind in every fashion. As a denomination, the Church

of God of Prophecy believes in worldwide evangelism with all the ἔθνη of God's creation.

Today this body of believers is aligning itself more and more to the call of harvest and worldwide kingdom expansion. It is building on its foundation in Christ—his gospel call, deep holiness convictions, the Pentecostal experience, world mission compassion, the unity of all nations, and hunger for Christian union (Howard 51).

The overall finding that these churches strongly desire to help those in need found further support in the groups' desire to give beyond the local church, albeit with reasonable assurance their gifts would not be abused or wasted. The churches shared the joy they found in abundance as it enabled them to bless others and receive both spiritual and material blessings as a result. This joyful attitude included, perhaps even raised up, all those who gave out their meager abundance, as well. In fact, the general theme I uncovered was a desire to use their blessings in such a way that the churches might fulfill even more completely their call to ministry while relishing both their earthly and heavenly family in the kingdom of God.

Personal observation. All three churches viewed the ability to give as a gift from God. As in all things discovered in this exploratory research, evidence indicates both the national and state leadership will want to develop Bible studies designed to aid in planning while creating significant opportunities for active personal and community growth. This format enables the church to use its physical facilities while also reaching out to the world around it.

As an analogy, most people leave home on vacation but plan their vacation while still at home. Many church members take work home to complete in order to perform

better at other locations. While such thinking should in no way limit the use of a church's physical facilities, such thinking will enable the church to take advantage of opportunities among the people the church has been called to serve.

At no time, even in areas where further insight will empower greater success in sharing abundance, did anyone act uninterested or opposed to greater giving. The consensus sought greater opportunities to give, according to *plain* scriptural guidance. Questions about waste, misuse, and work did appear, but guided studies of Scripture will resolve these questions. Further, for the majority, growth in these areas has become a fundamental goal for their lives as they have developed personal experience in generous giving from whatever abundance God has provided.

Literature review. The literature review demonstrates that God provides abundance to care for those in need as well as those possessing it. The story of feeding the five thousand may be found in all four Gospels. In Matthew 14:20, Louw and Nida define περισσεῖον as *excessive* pieces (78.31). In Luke 9:17, περισσεῦσαν, and in John 6:12, περισσεύσαντα, both mean *leftover* pieces (59.52). In Mark 6:43, Louw and Nida define πληρώματα to say twelve *completely filled* baskets of pieces (59.36). Even though only John references the young boy who contributed the five loaves and two fishes, none of these stories imply anyone, not even the young boy, received anything other than plenty. Both possessor and recipient had enough and more left over. One church clearly relied on this Scripture for guidance and understanding, demonstrating one technique for achieving the scriptural support this project recommends.

First Kings 17:8-24 tells the story of God deciding to feed Elijah for a time. Typically, God acts with economy. He may have thought, "Why feed just one, when for

the same effort, I can feed three?” Scripture describes the widow’s obedience even from the depth of her poverty, feeding Elijah first while always finding plenty remaining for her and her son.

One thought worthy of exploration comes from the *Didache*, which is *not* part of the KJV. The writings addressing generosity in the *Didache* may be summed up as, “[L]ove your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10.27). Nonetheless, because these writings cannot be found in the King James exactly as they are laid out in the *Didache*, their full acceptance will require those desiring to use them to pinpoint first their scriptural parallels and then identify these writings in the *Didache* as practical applications of Scripture. In other words, the *Didache* should serve as a support for clarifying and connecting definitively with Scripture such concepts as the deserving poor, the Protestant work ethic, and the nature of genuine community. This effort would enable the churches to move past worldly understandings and more firmly into the desired biblical ones.

Biblical. Scripture leaves no doubt about the significance of stewardship and action. In 1:22-25, James identifies the tendency of people to deceive themselves about God’s will and word in Scripture:

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth *therein*, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. (KJV)

James worries his audience will hear the word preached and then ignore it. Dan G.

McCartney sums up this understanding quite well and allows me to address an area of confusion here: “Self-deception happens when the truth is uncomfortable, either because

it shatters the self-image someone prefers to have, or it threatens assumptions that lie close to the foundations of someone's understanding of reality" (31). Some members of the churches involved in the project's focus groups shared beliefs that functioned much like worldviews. In fact, the word *assumptions*, in the context of the research's focus groups fails to address this concern fully. No one opposed radical generosity; they just did not want to waste their blessings. The worldviews in question had formed in their lives around the understanding of their Protestant work ethic and/or a concern about enabling a destructive way of live.

Unpacking the churches' understanding of the Protestant work ethic requires a return to Paul in 2 Thessalonians 3:10-11: "For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies." Paul had no intention of restricting the churches' efforts to evangelize among the poor. His intent was to prevent the lazy and idle from interfering in everyone else's business and to keep them out of politics (Witherington *1 and 2 Thessalonians* 245-53).

In fact, Paul encouraged the Corinthians to be active among the poor. His goal was for them to "look for opportunities to be good stewards, helping others" instead of themselves (Witherington *Conflict* 427). The key will be to locate the needy in question as each church identifies them through their Bible studies, then to relate their needs to the proper Scripture. Certainly, widows and orphans should take little study, while drunkards, gluttons, and people of certain lifestyles may take more. This process of identifying those toward whom each church is called to serve merely means spending time identifying Scripture that will enable the church to be in the world without letting

the world take them back into the specific sin or sins of those that they are called to address.

Informs practice. The previous section also addresses the practice of ministry. As a denomination, many of the stumbling blocks to God-like generosity can be resolved so as to cover the basic concepts and leave the specifics to the local church as they identify the ministry and the issues facing the people the church wants to help. For example, the denomination can address homelessness in general, more specifically self-medicating addictions, and should research the differences between opioid dependencies and the other forms of addiction.

Armed with data that can be downloaded from the Internet, pastors and lay leaders can devise Bible studies fit to begin the conversation among concerned members and offer access as specific concerns, not initially addressed when the study was prepared, arise. This flexibility will enable the leaders to respond quickly to the unexpected. It will avoid unnecessary delays since an immediate, general response can be e-mailed or texted to everyone while a more detailed response is prepared for future study. Further, allowing the one who raises the concern immediate access to information that helps satisfy the concern will bring about multiple forms of growth within the congregation. Initially, the pastor, or strong lay leaders, will want to oversee the process of Bible study planning followed by activity within the community, but over time, this need should diminish as the level of preparedness and flexibility rises within the entire congregation.

The key element may prove to be the concept of stewardship over God's resources, his gifts. The Church of God of Prophecy teaches intentional, focused

stewardship and has become very comfortable with this concept, so covering the basics will not require additional work. The feedback received from the churches will create an opportunity to circulate different pathways that local churches can take to accomplish their own specific goals. Using stewardship as the background against which all church activities are to be viewed will allow the churches to enjoy radical generosity while not enabling the idleness against which Paul spoke.

Implications of the Findings

Members of the Church of God of Prophecy in central Kentucky enjoy reaching out to others in need. They enjoy having an abundance that allows them to reach out but continue to give even in times when their abundance shrinks to less than the amounts with which they are most comfortable. The churches enjoy in-kind giving. The size of the financial abundance will not control the specifics of their giving, but in-kind giving would likely need to increase in order to achieve the results desired. They feel called to support both local and global ministries and want to be certain their gifts are properly used. God expects both distributive stewardship and preservative stewardship from his children.

Therefore, a focus on generosity as opportunity to enhance the quality of life within God's kingdom will be a point the Church of God of Prophecy will want to stress in order to avoid confusing one's quality of life with one's riches. This position will require significant emphasis on the value of human beings and human relationships as a vital component in enjoying a greater quality of life for all. Some Scriptures are helpful:

What is the price of two sparrows—one copper coin? But not a single sparrow can fall to the ground without your Father knowing it. ³⁰ And the very hairs on your head are all numbered. ³¹ So don't be afraid; you are more valuable to God than a whole flock of sparrows. (Matt. 10:29-31)

What is the price of five sparrows—two copper coins? Yet God does not forget a single one of them. And the very hairs on your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are more valuable to God than a whole flock of sparrows. (Luke 12:6-7)

Other Scriptures may require more exegesis in order for the connection between Scripture and the lesson taught to be seen clearly, and the connection must be crystal clear if the μετάνοια sought is to be achieved. Luke 15 is filled with other obvious Scripture passages. Even better, Luke 12:32-34 provides the additional opportunity to teach how God controls his own response to human generosity, not the human who gives:

So don't be afraid, little flock. For it gives your Father great happiness to give you the Kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to those in need. This will store up treasure for you in heaven! And the purses of heaven never get old or develop holes. Your treasure will be safe; no thief can steal it and no moth can destroy it. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.

Regardless which Scriptures the church chooses to teach, the application desired must stand out in the Scripture taught. The church defines Scripture as its authority for the will of God. The people in the churches entirely believe. The opportunity presented by this convergence is to blessed to be overlooked.

Limitations of the Study

This project explored the members' understanding of certain terms frequently used in theological discussion. It could not clarify meanings without increasing the likelihood of influencing the members' responses. Therefore, the likelihood of every member understanding each term using the same concepts would be very small. Some uniformity would be expected since the members' involved in the project are representative of, though not identical with, their churches. The expected variance would make complete uniformity among all members of all churches with the data collected

unexpected and surprising. Those members chosen to participate were clearly spiritually mature leaders within their congregations. In fact, their spiritual maturity was specifically requested of the pastors who selected them. Additionally, one church was rural, another on the outskirts of a large city, while the third was located in a medium-sized community. Two of the churches were larger; one was somewhat smaller. All the participants were Anglo, the majority over 40 years of age.

In spite of these differences, the results are clear that while the members of each church had developed locally specific ways of identifying and addressing Scripture and its interpretation, the overlap among all three churches was great. Even though this overlap will enable a more focused response for the Church of God of Prophecy in Kentucky, this reality does limit the project's generalizability to the denomination beyond. Future research will want to account for the specific degree of unity among the churches concerning insight and understanding.

The project's scope was limited to three Church of God of Prophecy churches located in central Kentucky. Since the beliefs of the people in the Church of God of Prophecy in Kentucky harmonize closely, these findings can be generalized within Kentucky until such time as further work uncovers significant variations. Another project, conducted using the same protocols, should not reveal significant variations within Kentucky. As the scope extends beyond Kentucky, the generalizability of the findings would diminish. This diminishing generalizability would hold true if the protocols were followed in the various ethnic cultures in which the Church of God of Prophecy has been established, even more so in mission environments. However, they

will prove helpful for most Church of God of Prophecy churches located in the Southeast United States.

The number of members participating was small. Initially the project sought between thirty and thirty-five participants. Only ten participated. The Church of God of Prophecy currently has 3,401 members in Kentucky, with over 1.5 million worldwide. The percentage of participants was very small, as would be expected in an exploratory survey. Increasing the sample size will increase the confidence generated by this protocol as well as its generalizability.

Unexpected Observations

The unanimity uncovered concerning the overwhelming joy in reaching out to others in need was the most important unexpected observation. Each member supported benevolent giving as a crucial ministry of the church. As expected, the project uncovered many variations on how giving might be accomplished (e.g., in-kind, direct financial assistance, person-to-person assistance in meeting needs). Still, the joyful desire to do more made the greatest impression. I expected a powerful desire to give but did not expect to find such unalloyed joy in giving.

The presence of the prosperity gospel was far less than expected. The project found it in only a very few places and anticipates clarifying feedback on at least one of these. The perspective taken when stating, “You cannot outgive God,” requires examination. One church immediately indicated that it meant not being able to outgive God in the sense of creating obligations for God to meet. The other two began as though it were a law of the universe, although further discussion quickly established this principle as truth only because God chooses the standard to be true.

In other discussions members discussed the role of work in a person's prosperity and abundance while the question of using discernment to determine the deserving poor arose in another. These differences may prove insignificant in the long run, but the absence of prosperity gospel discussion caused them to stand out more than they would have otherwise.

Recommendations

Many denominations, whether at the local grassroots level or at the broad global level support the idea of creating community by generously sharing God's abundant blessings on his people. Learning how to do so consistent with biblical principles can create disagreement. Often the easiest rubric for discerning any scriptural position, not just generosity and abundance, is to determine who benefits from this position. Who receives the glory and the wealth? Who lives comfortably? Who avoids material hardship, enjoys the blessings of their culture, and most quickly gains the ears of those who can change their situation when things do go wrong? The Bible says to give God the glory. Christians do that when they obey Christ's commands: "You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind," (Luke 10:27) and, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27). This verse admonishes the church then to ensure God receives the glory and the recipients receive the primary benefit. The obedient Christian must surrender control of the response God chooses, leaving the choice to him alone.

The Church of God of Prophecy, like almost every church in Kentucky, wants to empower its people to live in God's abundance, generously meeting the needs of those around them. Unlike many regional churches, the Church of God of Prophecy in

Kentucky can look to a unified acceptance of the KJV as the authoritative translation of Scripture. They share a unified history of stewardship, understood as using God's gifts for the betterment of others. On these foundations they can build.

The project revealed no resistance to giving. Those concerns that arose from discussions about the deserving poor, work, or the inability to outgive God can be addressed alongside inquiries to learn to whom one gives, where, and how. Using the church's trust in the KJV means this translation will guide the church in applying Scripture in ways that will leave none of God's children wanting. The project discussed the *Didache*, which is not part of anyone's canon. Nevertheless, this and other references speak plainly to the issues. Much of the work identifying Scriptures that agree with such works has already been done. The church should accept or reject these approaches as led by the Lord with prayer, using the gift of discernment to benefit others. Providing outlines for Bible studies that explore the misunderstanding language can cause while guiding participants to see for themselves who and how to help will be beneficial for empowering people to recognize specific areas they and the members of their church can address.

The project determined additional benefits could be obtained through further research. This project uncovered concerns regarding work and determining who deserves to be helped, as well as ambiguity over the law of returns. A mixed, exploratory focus group project featuring a questionnaire sent randomly and anonymously to members of the Church of God of Prophecy in central Kentucky followed by a more statistically valid selection of churches in which to hold the focus groups would enable the church to

determine whether these comments reflected the verbiage heard in casual conversations or whether genuine misunderstandings existed.

Newly created and distributed Bible study materials can be designed to enhance learning and planning by using the existing Bible study arrangements already in place in most churches but intended to be put into action outside the church. The key to this plan's success is having the organizational and design functions done in the church, at least in the earliest stages, with the activity selected performed away from the church, among those toward whom the church reaches out. Most denominations have Bible studies of this type in place, ones that would require few initial alterations to attain results.

The project recommends

- Taking advantage of the KJV's authority and clarifying confusion with specific Scriptures
- Arranging for further research, and
- Beginning to use existing structures for recommended Bible study while executing the ministry discerned to be God's will outside the existing structures among the target population.

Postscript

Americans are quickly becoming a nation of greed, mired up in a cesspool of unnecessary paraphernalia. Nevertheless, while exploring generosity in the Church of God of Prophecy in central Kentucky I found not only a sense of the duty Christians have to help those in poverty or need but a joy in the giving and in the relationships which arise from heartfelt generosity towards others. These truths are church.

God created *koinonia* as a blessing for the whole *ekklēsia*. Individual Christians work with partners, through the grace given believers in Jesus Christ, for him, in order to grow into his holy image. This *koinonia* cannot exist in isolation. It is never just about one person. It is never just about anyone operating solo. God calls Christ's church into a *koinonia* similar to the unity of the Trinity, among Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. For the purpose of discussing the Trinity, with this denomination the label Holy Ghost works best. This *koinonia* requires enormous power to succeed. Higher theological education teaches the preferential use of the phrase Holy Spirit. Wrestling with the Evil One calls out for the name *Holy Ghost*.

The church must face this current reality. Satan found a powerful way to corrupt godly love for the American Dream by convincing the church that excess was normal, greed to be expected, and blame cast on the poor and weak for their suffering was holiness and righteousness. Peter warned the church about teachers who would twist God's truth for money (2 Pet. 2.1-3). The *prosperity gospel* elevates this style of deceit to a place where its victims are blamed when they fall prey to those who practice it.

Reaching its people's potential is the church's problem, not its solution. No one can do so alone. The most brilliant surgeon living, when completely candid, will quickly admit he or she has more mediocre days than magnificent ones. He or she cannot reach the goal of maximizing potential because no matter how high an emotional IQ, when he or she focuses hard enough to give 100 percent, failure occurs in other areas of life, which, in the long run, turn out to be of equal or greater importance.

This turning away from truth is the elemental reality of the prosperity gospel. The easiest tool to determine if gifts are given for God's glory or for personal reward is to

determine which is discussed more, or who benefits. Conversations that discuss the gift and the reward it will bring the giver indicate a focus on the giver while conversations that discuss the person who needs the gift and how it will bless them demonstrate concern for God's glory and for those whose needs he uses givers to meet. Conversations that praise God for providing the means to make the gift and include the likelihood the recipient will similarly praise God demonstrate the gift in question was designed to benefit others, not the giver. The topic most frequently discussed reveals the reason for the gift, and the heart of the giver. Let God be glorified.

The kingdom of God has been called since creation to be God's steward among creation. In the first chapter of Genesis, all creatures were commanded to be fruitful and multiply. Stewardship is not hoarding, instead it is generosity towards all. In the parable of the extravagant sower, seed was cast upon every surface; hard trodden ground, rocky ground, weed-choked ground, and fertile ground (Luke 8.4-8). The one who sowed the seed was concerned about the return gathered, not the seed scattered. He did not differentiate between worthy ground and unworthy ground. Instead, he scattered seed wherever he could, trusting the seed to be fruitful and multiply.

The one who provides abundance acts just the same way. He scatters his abundance across the earth, knowing in advance some will never be fruitful or multiply greatly. Nevertheless, he still scatters abundance knowing some will be fruitful and generous. He knows some will bring forth hundreds of times what they were received because they will give according to God's supply of seeds, not their own.

APPENDIX A
INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

Overflowing Generosity

You are invited to be in a research study being done by Glenn Douglass from the Asbury Theological Seminary. You are invited because you are either the pastor or an active member of one of the five churches of the Church of God of Prophecy located in central Kentucky. The information to be discussed in the focus group will center on generosity, charity, abundance, and prosperity. The research seeks to gain your understanding and experience of these concepts.

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to join with the focus group assembled at your local church and to help discuss the topics covered in the questions asked by the researcher, Glenn Douglass. The focus group will assemble on _____
_____ for no more than 90 minutes.

Only you and those the pastor, you, and the other members of the group choose to inform will know that you are participating in the study. A letter/number designation will conceal your identity within the dissertation itself. No one except the researcher will know your name or which church you attend.

By participating you agree to maintain confidentiality of what the pastor and other participants in the study say in the interview. The pastor and other participants agree to provide the same commitment to you. Please do not share what any participant, including the pastor, says or does during this focus group session. Please maintain strict confidentiality among yourselves, as well.

All notes made by the researcher and all recordings obtained using this portable mini handheld camcorder will be kept under lock and key for one year. The recordings will not be transcribed but will be reviewed by the researcher for accuracy. All information obtained by or transferred to electronic form for use with any electronic device will only be used on password-secured electronic devices. All notes, recordings, and electronic data will be commercially destroyed after one year from publication of the dissertation. The dissertation will then be the only surviving document relating to this research.

If something makes you feel bad while you are in the study, please tell Glenn Douglass. If you decide at any time you do not want to finish the study, you may stop whenever you want. Please feel free to leave the focus group whenever you choose.

You can ask Glenn Douglass questions any time about anything in this study. His phone number is: XXX-XXX-XXXX. This is the cellphone number and the cellphone accepts messages 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. You can also ask any trusted friend or advisor any questions you might have about this study.

Signing this paper means that you have read this or had it read to you, and that you want to be in the study. If you do not want to be in the study, do not sign the paper. Being in the study is up to you, and no one will be mad if you do not sign this paper or even if you change your mind later. You agree that you have been told about this study and why it is being done and what to do.

Signature of Person Agreeing to be in the Study

Date Signed

APPENDIX B

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Project: Overflowing Generosity

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewees and Length of Time in the Group

Describe Project to Participants:

1. The research explored the current understanding and practice of biblical generosity and abundance, as compared to charity and prosperity, within congregations of the Church of God of Prophecy in central Kentucky.
2. The participants in our focus group will be the pastor(s) and the 6-7 members of the congregation chosen by the pastor.
3. During our discussion, I will sit next to the portable mini handheld camcorder where I can observe the participants, asking questions and suggesting prompts as necessary. I will take notes and will make an audio/video recording of the group's interactions.
4. During my review of the notes and the audio/video recording, I will assign a number and a letter designating each contributor in our group to insure all participation remains anonymous. As a result, any information or conclusions I share about our work today for this project will not be traceable to you.
5. The focus group's work should last approximately 90 minutes.

Have participants read and sign the consent form.

Turn on and test the portable mini handheld camcorder.

The words generosity, charity, abundance, and prosperity took on many meanings during the end of the 20th Century and the beginning of the 21st. In order to appreciate the group's current understanding of these terms, the project will not draw limits around any of these terms while we work.

Questions:

1. Let's discuss the concept of generosity.
 - a) Specifically, how do you understand generosity as it is described in the Bible?
 - b) On the other hand, how do you understand it based on our church's doctrine?
 - c) Finally, are there any other ways you understand generosity we should include?
 - d) In that case, how do you see these understandings put into practice?
2. Next, let's discuss the concept of abundance.
 - a) Specifically, how do you understand abundance as it is described in the Bible?
 - b) On the other hand, how do you understand it based on our church's doctrine?
 - c) Finally, are there any other ways you understand abundance we should include?
 - d) In that case, how do you see these understandings put into practice?
3. Next, let's discuss the concept of charity.
 - a) Specifically, how do you understand charity as it is described in the Bible?
 - b) On the other hand, how do you understand it based on our church's doctrine?
 - c) Finally, are there any other ways you understand charity we should include?
 - d) In that case, how do you see these understandings put into practice?
4. Next, let's discuss the concept of prosperity.
 - a) Specifically, how do you understand prosperity as it is described in the Bible?
 - b) On the other hand, how do you understand it based on our church's doctrine?
 - c) Finally, are there any other ways you understand prosperity we should include?
 - d) In that case, how do you see these understandings put into practice?
5. How do these understandings and practices of generosity and abundance inform the view and understanding of charity and prosperity for Christians in the Church of God of Prophecy in central Kentucky?

Prompts:

1. What do you understand about _____ from Scripture?
2. What does the church teach about _____?
3. What have you been taught about _____ from any source?
4. Could you please share more about what you just said?

APPENDIX C

CHURCH OF GOD OF PROPHECY CHURCHES

IN CENTRAL KENTUCKY'S UNDERSTANDING OF GENEROSITY

Points of Discussion	Total Members	Members Active in Discussing Point	Orientation Pos, Neg, Neut	% of Total Members
Many Members/Longer Discussion				
Meeting the needs of others	14	13	Positive	93
Giving time, goods, and things other than money	14	12	Positive	86
Joyful giving as led by God	14	10	Positive	71
Purpose/Place of discernment	14	10	Neutral	71
Interaction with recipient	14	12	Positive	86
Fewer Members/Longer Discussion				
Sacrificial giving, giving all available	14	6	Positive	43
Giving to meet crisis	14	6	Positive	43
Helping less fortunate	14	3	Positive	21
Specific stories of generosity	14	6	Positive	43
Giving to meet crisis	14	6	Positive	43
God's love source of giving	14	4	Positive	29
Giving without regard to deserving poor	14	4	Positive	29
Giving with regard to deserving poor	14	6	Neutral	43
Fewer Members/Little Discussion				
Giving so others will be able to give later	14	2	Positive	14
Don't use guilt to motivate	14	1	Negative	7
Tithing is not generosity	14	2	Neutral	14

Points of Discussion	Total Members	Members Active in Discussing Point	Orientation Pos, Neg, Neut	% of Total Members
ROI, giving members \$100 to increase	14	3	Negative	21
Fear of being taken advantage of	14	5	Negative	36
Address Local Needs First	14	3	Negative	21
Giving for return	14	1	Negative	7
Giving for recognition	14	1	Negative	7

APPENDIX D

CHURCH OF GOD OF PROPHECY CHURCHES IN CENTRAL

KENTUCKY'S UNDERSTANDING OF ABUNDANCE

Points of Discussion	Total Members	Members Active in Discussing Point	Orientation Pos, Neg, Neut	% of Total Members
Many Members/Longer Discussion				
Cannot outgive God	14	14	Neutral	100
Abundance becomes more than needed or necessary	14	11	Positive	79
Fewer Members/Longer Discussion				
Blessed when giving beyond 10%	14	6	Positive	43
Giving as directed in prayer and by discernment	14	6	Positive	43
God gives rest and strength when we give of our time	14	6	Positive	43
Look beyond earthly existence for abundance	14	6	Positive	43
Abundance = family, food, shelter, also money	14	4	Positive	29
Having more creates wanting more	14	4	Negative	29
Abundance must be shared w/others, not stored	14	3	Positive	21
Working with God's gifts where we are for others	14	3	Positive	21
Fewer Members/Little Discussion				
Abundance can be wasted, no one gets a blessing	14	4	Negative	29
Training children to give abundantly	14	2	Positive	14
Giving when abundance is meager	14	2	Positive	14
Perceived equity of distribution determines sense of fairness	14	2	Neutral	14
Earned via hard work, given to deserving poor	14	2	Negative	14
So much more was overwhelmed by idea of tithe	14	2	Negative	14

Points of Discussion	Total Members	Members Active in Discussing Point	Orientation Pos, Neg, Neut	% of Total Members
So much more abundance was overwhelmed by temptations	14	2	Negative	14
Holy Spirit needed to give beyond duty/ obedience	14	1	Positive	7

APPENDIX E

CHURCH OF GOD OF PROPHECY CHURCHES IN CENTRAL

KENTUCKY’S UNDERSTANDING OF CHARITY AND PROSPERITY

Points of Discussion	Total Members	Members Active in Discussing Point	Orientation Pos, Neg, Neu	% of Total Members
Many Members/Longer Discussion				
Charity equals love	14	8	Positive	57
Abusive institutions taking advantage of people in giving	14	8	Neutral	57
Gift of discernment to tell the real from the sham	14	5	Neutral	36
W/O charity, just clanging brass, all talk	14	5	Positive	36
Love/charity is an action word	14	4	Positive	29
Entire discussion, generosity, abundance, charity all make up God’s prosperity	14	4	Positive	29
Fewer Members/Longer Discussion				
Charity/Love is root of generosity	14	3	Positive	21
Giving simply for joy—Toll booth and McDonald’s	14	3	Positive	21
Our work should be for God’s glory and what comes from that work	14	3	Positive	21
Charity as institutional giving	14	3	Neutral	21
Prosperity is a consequence of work, not luck	14	2	Neutral	14
Prosperity as blessing from God including physical and spiritual (3 John 2)	14	2	Positive	14
Charity includes denial and self-sacrifice	14	2	Positive	14
Includes loving the unlovable	14	2	Positive	14
Fewer Members/Little Discussion				
Prosperity reflects more how excess is handled than how it’s earned	14	1	Positive	7
Gold mines and oil wells	14	1	Neutral	7

Points of Discussion	Total Members	Members Active in Discussing Point	Orientation Pos, Neg, Neu	% of Total Members
More about the work done to obtain prosperity not born with it. Just good at making things work.	14	1	Neutral	7
Charitable obedience brings godly return	14	1	Negative	7

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