

# Just a Minute..

2 Corinthians 8:1-2 “And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.”



We, at INcontext, would hereby like to wish you a **GENEROUS CHRISTMAS**. May we all be reminded anew that this season of joy and good tidings fully reveals a God who loves so intimately and desires to bless so generously that He gave His only begotten Son so that everyone who believes in Him shall be saved. This is the glorious and generous message of Christmas.

As an INcontext team we recently held our annual meetings with nearly fifty workers, partners and friends from across the globe attending. It was glorious! We were able to hear reports from Egypt, Tanzania, Uganda, the USA, Lebanon, Bhutan, Nepal, India and Bangladesh. In the midst of stories of war, fear, corruption and trauma there was one underlining message that surfaced: God is sovereignly in control and fully determined to bless mankind.

This is the ‘take-home’ encouragement for this season. The foundational truth of Christmas is this: God is determined to bless mankind. It’s not a call to judgement – Jesus did not come to judge but to save (John 12:47). It is not a call to submission – Jesus did not come to submit but to serve (Mark 10:45). Christmas is indeed a celebration of a generous God.

Don’t get me wrong, this is not a *Gospel of Prosperity* – this is a *Gospel of Generosity*.

But this ‘take-home’ encouragement comes with a price tag. And here I agree with my friend Richard Baird who originally shared this message, that we should never offer an encouragement without offering a challenge. And the challenge is this – will you be part of the means of God’s determination to bless mankind?

The theme that flowed from all our reports and planning at our meeting was **GENEROSITY**. As a team we came to a new understanding that generosity in scripture is not measured in monetary value, neither is it an act that flows from a position of abundance (see the story of the widow in Mark 12:41-43 and the testimony of the Macedonian Church in 2 Corinthians 8:2). We discovered that true generosity is born in a place of need and brokenness. In fact, the Greek word for generosity, *aplotes*, is used to describe sincerity, generosity and simplicity. Three virtues that are indispensable in conveying God’s determination to bless mankind.

But what truly spoke to our hearts, and one of the most profound descriptions of generosity I have ever heard, was the following definition: *You, giving me what I need, is CHARITY. You, giving me what YOU need, is GENEROSITY.*

Oh, may this be a generous Christmas! Not a Christian celebration of charity, but a Christ-centred celebration of generosity – a time where the Church will be less charitable and more generous. A time where we will share from a position of need and not from a position of abundance. A time where, like the Macedonian Churches (2 Corinthians 8:2) we will provide rich generosity in the midst of our own trials, with overflowing joy and tangible simplicity.

During our meetings our Egyptian colleague shared that **GENEROUS FAITH** is not only inspiring people to have faith when *THEY* need it, generous faith is inspiring others when *WE* need it. For the Church in Egypt – in the midst of daily challenges, the recent shootings in Minya, the deteriorating economy and a struggling Church – a generous faith is displayed when those who need hope themselves, instead offer hope to others.

From Lebanon, we learnt that us giving the refugees the hope that they need is a charitable hope. But, the refugees sharing their hope that they so desperately seek, is a generous hope. The one Syrian brother, who has lost everything in the war and had to seek refuge in Lebanon said the following:

*“We only know one thing and we only hold on to one thing; that there is one person that can give us joy. I have hope today. Hope that I will return. Hope that I will share the Gospel with my people. Hope that Syria will turn to Christ.”*

We understood afresh the words of Eugene Peterson (professor, pastor and poet): *“I have pitched my tent in the land of Hope!”* We realised that generous hope does not flow from an abundance of hope but is nurtured by the Source of hope.

From South Africa, we learnt that a generous love is not us only loving those who are in need of our love, but loving those from whom we are in need of their love. In other words, loving our enemies. With so many voices of fear and suspicion speaking hatred and division, we reaffirmed as a team that the ‘currency’ we deal with regarding land expropriation, corruption, social injustices and racism will be love, hope and faith. This is not because we have an abundance of love, but because we are rooted in Love (Christ).

As we finished our time together, we realised anew that generosity is a key to a living faith. We realised that charity is a good thing, but generosity is a ‘God-thing’, and that the difference between charity and generosity – ordinary and extraordinary – is indeed that little extra.

Within a Kingdom context there can be no place for half-hearted involvement. God is determined to bless mankind – we as the Church will only become the means through which it will be achieved through generous, abundant and timely involvement.

May this Christmas be a time of generosity.