

Faithful Giving

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE RIDLEY COMMUNITY / MISSION & MINISTRY COLLEGE

Issue No.

148

WINTER 2016

Circle of Divine Generosity

Michael Bird explains how divine generosity is a circle that begins and ends with God.

THEOLOGY OF GIVING

1



A friend of mine was once doing a short internship at an African-American church in the United States. During the Sunday morning service, when the offering was taken up, the congregation would sing a song about sowing in generosity and reaping a blessing. My friend would always shake his head at this, feeling somewhere between bemused and alarmed at this flagrant display of prosperity theology. He felt no small dose of shame when it dawned on him one day that the congregation was in fact singing the words of St Paul in 2 Corinthians:

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

2 Corinthians 9:6-8

Just to be clear, God is not a slot machine. We do not put money into him and hope that the odds are in our favour and he pays out big sometime soon. Nor is God a Ponzi scheme where we offer him our financial gifts with a view to sharing in his riches until it all goes bust. And God is not an investment opportunity where we get the inside track on an exciting new project with the guarantee of exponential profits after a short period. God is nothing like this.

What is certain, because it is scriptural, is that God is generous and he generously blesses his people. It is from this blessing that we in turn feel the tug of the Holy Spirit in our hearts to bless others out of our abundance and to bless God back out of thanksgiving. Divine generosity creates a contagious habit of giving that exponentially increases as it is experienced and shared with others. This isn't about algorithms or karma. Rather it is the circle of divine generosity that begins with God and ends with God, because God is the giver of all good things, and we are part of that circle in our own giving and receiving of gifts.

It is dangerous, because it is so obviously alluring, to think that if we give to the church or to charity, that God somehow owes us. That's not true. It never has been and never will be. Who can lend to the Lord that the Lord should owe him or her anything? God has no creditors, only debtors, those who have been redeemed from debtors' prison! What is true, however, is that if we give to this circle of divine generosity, we will contribute to an abundance of blessing for those in need (sowing) and we ourselves will benefit from it in due course (reaping). The little boy who gave Jesus five barley loaves and two small fish saw his gift miraculously multiplied and used to feed others, and he himself probably ate more than he had brought along that day.

When we engage in feats of generosity, we are never to think about what we can get out of it. Rather we should be driven by thanksgiving and a desire to bless others as we ourselves have been blessed. We are to believe that from our meagre or mighty resources God is able to do much. As we give, we can confidently expect the circle of divine generosity to spin faster and wider, and to find ourselves experiencing the exponential blessings of its increasing revolutions.

Michael F. Bird
Lecturer in Theology

In This Issue	no.148
Faithful Giving	
Circle of Divine Generosity	1
From the Principal	2
Giving in Leadership	3
Foundation for the Future	4
Book Review	5

For The Calendar

June 1	Leon Morris Lecture given by Tom Schreiner
Aug 23–25	'Unless they Hear: The Urgency of Evangelistic Preaching' Annual Preachers' Conference
Sep 22	Alfred Stanway Lecture given by Chris Wright
Oct 6	Charles Perry Lecture given by Joanna Cruickshank
Oct 27–28	Marketplace Institute Conference

**Same Sex Attraction:
A Pastoral Response
with visiting scholar Wes Hill**



**2 Day Conference
For Pastors, Church Workers,
Christian Teachers, Chaplains**

Aug 1	Pastoral Issues
Aug 2	Missional Questions

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/weshill>



**3 Church Events
For Christians 7:30–9:30pm**

July 28	'Washed & Waiting: The Church & Same-Sex Attraction' New Hope Baptist Church, Blackburn North
Aug 2	'Saints or Sinners?: The Bible & Same-Sex Attraction' Holy Trinity Doncaster
Aug 3	'The Lost Art of Friendship & Singleness' St Hilary's Kew

Please check the Ridley website for times
and locations: www.ridley.edu.au/events
or join our events mailing list:
j.daw@ridley.edu.au

170 The Avenue, Parkville, Victoria 3052
ph: 03 9207 4800 / email: info@ridley.edu.au
www.ridley.edu.au



From the Principal

"Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. His love endures forever" (Psalm 136:1). The **goodness and love of God** are indeed solid grounds for Christian gratitude.

PARKVILLE CAMPUS LIFE

2

We regularly give thanks for many things at Ridley College: enthusiastic students, dedicated faculty, friendly and efficient staff, prayerful and generous supporters, good food, pleasing surroundings, like-minded churches and Christian organizations, freedom of religion in society. At Graduation and Commissioning a few weeks ago we gave thanks for 57 students finishing their studies and heading off to serve God in all sorts of contexts. You can see the full list of graduates in the *Community Report* insert in this issue of the *Ridley Report*. All of these things are obvious blessings from the hand of our good and loving God.

However, when giving thanks we don't often think of those involved in serving on the College Board. Members of the Board bring a wide range of experience and expertise to their roles. I was relatively new to corporate governance when I started at Ridley four years ago and I have come to appreciate the value of a committed and wise Board. Generous contributions are made by all of the members of the Ridley Board to the direction and welfare of the College. This has certainly been the case with Ms Claire Rogers and Right Rev Stephen Hale, the Chair and Deputy Chair, who have provided leadership to the Board for the last 8.5 years and 10 years respectively. We thank God for their diligent labours, especially

in helping Ridley to negotiate changes in theological education over that time and in helping us to develop strategic plans to enable Ridley to continue training Christian leaders in challenging times.

We give thanks too for our new Chair, Professor Greg Baxter, and Deputy Chair, Rev Sandy Jones. Both have been serving on the Board for several years already. You can read about their motives for serving and their hopes for the College in this issue of the *Ridley Report*. Please pray for them.

The theme of generosity and gratitude is also taken up in Mike Bird's reflections on God's generosity, in Neil Bach's report on the Leon and Mildred Morris Foundation and in the review of my book on contentment and giving.

The fact that you are reading this *Ridley Report* likely indicates that you care about the College. We regard those of you who pray for or give to the College as partners with us in the work of the gospel. For each and every one of you I am sincerely grateful. Thankyou!

Brian Rosner
Principal

Giving in Leadership

Ridley Board members volunteer their time and expertise to set direction and oversee the work of the College. Incoming Chair, **Greg Baxter** and Deputy Chair, **Sandy Jones** share their journeys so far.

COLLEGE BOARD

3

RR: Who are you?

GB: I am a professor in physics at Victoria University with a research interest in optics. I am actively volunteering within my community through chairing a Jobs and Skills Taskforce with Hume City Council and chairing the North Western Regional Working Group to help automotive workers in the north west of Melbourne find new jobs once we stop manufacturing vehicles in Australia.

SJ: I originally trained as a nurse, specialising in renal dialysis and transplantation. I was ordained in Melbourne in 1993 and have served in a number of parishes and roles. I am currently Managing Director of Leading ConneXions. In this role I invest in leaders in local churches, denominations, mission agencies, NGO/NFP organisations and boards, theological colleges, education, and businesses. This may involve vision implementation to achieve strategic priorities and outcomes, empowering teams to cultivate strengths in relational wisdom and effective engagement, resolving conflict or leading organisational change. I also coordinate the EPIC Leadership Programme for the Diocese of Melbourne for clergy leading church communities.

RR: Why did you join the Board?

GB: The formation of Christian leaders has always been vital to the life of the church. However our society is changing very rapidly,

particularly in the way that people are learning. As I have broad experience of the university sector across practitioner, governance and management roles my hope was, and still is, that I could make a positive contribution to Ridley through the Board.

SJ: I had previously worked with the Board as a consultant in board effectiveness. I was deeply humbled and honoured to be asked to contribute not as an external enabler but as part of a team of highly motivated decision-makers. I was appointed in 2012 and have loved the transition in role.

—
I'm thankful for an
observed capacity
and commitment to act
strategically with biblical
wisdom and confidence in
trusting God's sovereignty
as we seek to sustain
effective gospel influence
in Melbourne and
globally.
—

RR: What have you seen happen in your time on the Board?

GB: The adoption and implementation of the Ridley Online strategy has been very exciting. To hear our online graduates testify to the quality of their training and the changes realised in all aspects of their lives is most rewarding.

SJ: The depth of trust and respect along with a breadth in perspective enables robust, rigorous and prayerful engagement in deliberating major decisions. I'm thrilled by the culture of innovative endeavour evidenced by the MA Gold with its recognition of the professional development needs of ministry practitioners, the Ridley Certificate, in-context learning, the development of online degrees, and the commitment to embed processes in the new blended learning formats that ensure students are beneficiaries of strengths in formation. It's been a joy to interview high calibre applicants for faculty positions and to see the growth in enrolments for doctoral studies.

RR: What are you looking forward to seeing happen at Ridley?

GB: The current discussion concerning on campus renewal through a substantial building project is both challenging and thrilling.

SJ: I am looking forward to exploring future development of our property to ensure our capacity to continue to offer quality on campus courses and community engagement. I hope to continue to be inspired by stories of graduates exercising faithful and fruitful gospel ministry, expressing thankfulness for the gospel partnership with Ridley in being equipped to serve.

RR: What do love about Ridley's leaders?

GB: I am heartened by the commitment of the leadership and faculty members to both learning and teaching quality and to research. With respect to learning and teaching I have seen much evidence that all staff are committed to the Christian formation of Ridley students, and in regard to research I believe they are actively challenging and shaping Christian thought for the sake of the gospel.

SJ: I am greatly encouraged by the Board's love for the people and growth of Ridley. They model a gospel passion and conviction that drives decision making, a breadth of experience and expertise, and a culture of honouring strong foundations yet daring to explore innovative strategies. I'm energised by the Board's willingness to be proactive in responding to the significant new trends and challenges impacting the tertiary sector and theological education. And I'm thankful for an observed capacity and commitment to act strategically with biblical wisdom and confidence in trusting God's sovereignty as we seek to sustain effective gospel influence in Melbourne and globally. It is a privilege to partner with my fellow members of the Board and the Leadership Team to advance the work of Ridley.

Image Below Left to Right:
New Chair Prof Greg Baxter,
New Deputy Chair Rev Sandy Jones with
outgoing Chair, Ms Claire Rogers and outgoing
Deputy Chair, Right Rev Stephen Hale



Foundation for the Future

Ridley receives gifts to support its work from a **special Foundation** set up by a former Principal, writes Neil Bach.

LEON AND MILDRED MORRIS FOUNDATION

4

The Reverend Dr Leon Morris was Principal of Ridley from 1964–79 and had earlier served on the faculty for a considerable number of years (1945–1949 and 1952–1959).

In the late 1980's Leon and his wife Mildred established the *Leon and Mildred Morris Foundation Ltd.* as an independent entity. It was their way of continuing a more expansive giving program and guaranteeing future support for the various missionary and ministry causes that they believed deserved support.

The Foundation continues today, and the Directors distribute the monies available to various causes, always with an eye to the original interests of the Morris's. Forty-five recipients have received one-off

or recurring grants over the years and Ridley College has enjoyed regular support.

The Foundation sees Ridley as important in the training of men and women for various ministry roles, ordained and lay, in Melbourne and Australia in a Reformed and evangelical ethos within the Anglican Church. It is gratifying to see the continued growth and impact of Ridley and its graduates. Grants to Ridley have included both general grants and grants for specific projects. The Foundation has a special interest in the library due to Leon's writings and his commitment to the Scriptures and is pleased that a dedicated collection of the works of Leon Morris resides in the library along with archives containing his numerous papers.



Image: Neil & Heather Bach with Leon Morris: *One Man's Fight for Love and Truth*

The Chair of the Foundation, Neil Bach, has included further information about the Foundation's growth and rationale in his recently published biography of Leon Morris. (*Leon Morris: One Man's Fight for Love and Truth*, Paternoster Press, 2016).

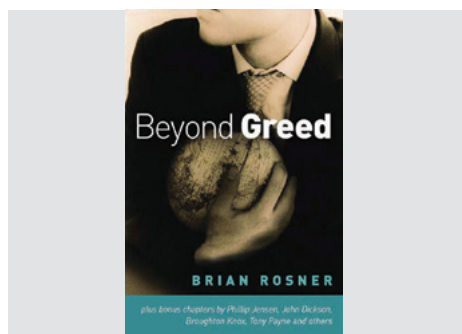
Neil Bach
Chair, Leon & Mildred Morris Foundation

Book Review

Sharon Kirk reviews an oldie but a goodie by Brian Rosner.

BEYOND GREED

5



In this engaging, easy-to-read and culturally relevant book Rosner sets out 'to deliver both a challenge and comfort to people who feel dissatisfied with the materialism of our age' (p.10). His aim is to effect practical change by first 'changing the way we think about ourselves, the world and God' (p.9).

In the first two of six parts Rosner lays the foundation for the remainder of the book by exposing the pervasiveness and idolatrous nature of the sin of greed, which he describes as 'a sophisticated form of idolatry' (p.10), prevalent but seemingly forgotten within Christian circles today.

In order to unmask greed and show its idolatrous nature, Rosner grounds his argument solidly in biblical teaching, pertinent examples and teaching from history, and helpful illustrations and insights into the thoughts, ways and beliefs of modern men and women. Greed results in divided loyalties for Christians, rivaling our love for and trust in God, and leaving us enslaved to the quest for more material things.

The message of this book is realistic and balanced, not suggesting that modern Christians should remove themselves totally from the materialistic world around them. According to Rosner, 'The problem...is not that we as individuals have things, but that we hold on to them so tightly' (p.63).

Having established the problem and danger of greed in Parts 1 and 2, Parts 3 and 4 address the cure for greed: contentment and sharing of possessions. These two aspects are explored from a sound biblical perspective, supported by great illustrations thus providing encouragement towards the joy of being content and giving generously.

The final two parts of the book bring the preceding material to a conclusion, helpfully pointing the reader towards a Christian lifestyle that opposes the subtleties and allurements of greed, and giving a biblical and wider perspective of true riches. Rosner's point here is very instructive: 'the way to flee the

love of money is to pursue God and godly virtues'. (p.170)

The second edition of *Beyond Greed* includes various articles from other modern authors, which build on and apply the teaching of the main chapters. This is where further practical implications are drawn out, touching on issues such as the education of children, personal spending, and subtle forms of gambling. I found John Dickson's question particularly challenging: 'Why not be as generous to others as you are luxurious with yourself?' (p.143)

Though some of the illustrations are now a little outdated, this book has much to offer. In my opinion Rosner achieves his goal – *Beyond Greed* is indeed a challenge and a comfort. It is a good reality check and a reminder that we are foolish to give our love and trust to the fleeting possessions of this world when the real riches are found in God. And it is an unsettling but necessary challenge for the modern Christian to identify the often subtle yet real dangers of greed in one's life. For the Christian who desires to live an undivided life, giving exclusive worship to the Lord Jesus Christ, *Beyond Greed* is well worth reading and applying.

Sharon Kirk
Greek Tutor, Ridley Online
Ridley College graduate