Revival and reformation

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**Does generosity produce revival?**
Strictly speaking, no. The Holy Spirit is the One Who is solely responsible for creating personal or individual revival. But He often uses human actions—particularly generosity—to stimulate revival. So generosity is one sure sign that our hearts are changed and that we are no longer living as though we were lord over our lives and possessions. Take Zacchaeus the tax collector for example: by separating himself from his money, he showed that genuine repentance had taken place in his heart; he was revived in the truest sense of the word (Luke 19:1-10). If groups of Christians turn from clutching their possessions to pouring them out for the lost and the poor, the result can be a genuine reformation. In 2 Corinthians 8-9, the apostle Paul teaches that generosity in one part of the body of Christ can encourage the other parts, inspiring God's people to render praise and thanksgiving to God for the great work He is doing in His church. Paul anticipated that the Corinthians and Macedonians' gifts would invigorate God's people. Generosity also can spread revival and reformation. Even the ministry of Jesus required fund raising (Luke 8:1-4). In the ministries of the Reformers and later Protestant leaders such as John Wesley and Charles Haddon Spurgeon, generous expenditures for training missionary pastors and planting churches led to the growth of those movements. A good number of the Baptist and Methodist churches in Britain today sprang from their ministries. Revival is the work of the Spirit, but God certainly uses His people to accomplish it and spread it.

**Does revival produce generosity?**
Yes. If a revival is truly a work of the Lord, it should lead to greater generosity on the part of the Lord's people. The goal of revival is the transformation of lives according to God's Word, and the Bible has a great deal to say about money, possessions and generosity. Moreover, revival should build faith in God's people, liberating us to trust Him and turn our lives and finances loose for the sake of His Kingdom. In Acts 2:42-47 and 4:32-37, we see that revival and the outpouring of God's Spirit produced radical generosity in the lives of God's people until there was "no poor among them." Likewise, revival can produce the desire to see others' lives transformed so that we increase our giving in order that God's good news might be taken to others.

**Does faith lead to generosity?**
Yes. True Christian faith, at least, leads to generosity. The apostle James writes that faith without works is dead (James 2:17). In other words, if real faith is present, then godly works will necessarily follow. And one of the works by which Christians are marked is generosity, especially toward God (Luke 12:21) and the poor (Luke 12:32-33). We Christians should ask ourselves—Does my life exhibit the generosity that comes from faith? If not, we probably need to take a closer look at our faith. Of course, people with true faith can persist in greed for a time, but only for so long. Eventually, if true faith is present, generosity will follow. Not only is this a biblical truth, but extensive research bears it out, as well.

**Are there examples from history of the connection between revival and generosity?**
Yes. David Aikman, in his book *Jesus in Beijing* (Regnery Publishing, 2003), reports on the impressive growth the Chinese house church movement experienced after massive financial sacrifice, as some of the poorest people in the world enabled missionaries to go far beyond their traditional boundaries. Of course, it often happens that we won't see the fruit of our giving in revival for many years—or until we have a truly heavenly perspective after this life. The hard work of missionary societies in the 19th century, which called British and American Christians to radical "going and giving," laid the groundwork for large-scale conversion many years later in Africa, Korea and Latin America. Many givers and missionaries never "saw fruit" in their lifetime, but in God's providence and timing, such generosity laid the groundwork and is the reason we have many more believers in those places than in present-day North America and Europe. Moreover, revival makes it necessary to fund the long, laborious task of disciple-making as Christian believers grow in maturity. On Arabic TV, one Muslim sheikh in Africa recently complained about the success Christians are having in converting many Muslims into disciples of Jesus. Unlike Christian missionary organizations that pour over $194 billion into missions each year, "There is a horrific absence of Muslim effort in the field." He cited in contrast the comprehensive efforts of Christians—hospitals, schools and churches—which contribute not only to "converts," but to mature, effective disciples all over Africa.

**As Christians in a lost world, shouldn't we be more concerned about evangelism than generosity?**
No. In ancient Israel, the Old Testament prophets regularly looked at economic injustice and the lack of funds for building the temple as a "spiritual barometer" for God's people. The ministry of John the Baptist followed in the footsteps of the Old Testament prophets and led to reformation and revival in preparation for the Messiah (Mark 1:1-5). Some of John's disciples were followers of Jesus (John 1:35-37, Acts 19:1-7), and many of the people who listened to John readily followed Jesus (Luke 7:24-30). Much of the fruit of this reformation that God produced through John's ministry was in generosity and righteousness in economic practices, as Luke 3:7-14 makes clear. In another instance, Jesus counseled the rich young ruler to give his possessions away for the poor so that the impediment to his participation in the Kingdom would be removed. Greed, covetousness, self-centeredness and materialism (our natural bent as humans) must be combated by biblical generosity. If individuals or churches turn from clutching their possessions to pouring them out for the lost and the poor, the result can be a genuine reformation. When we fail to properly teach about generosity and the Bible's perspective on possessions, we may in fact be impeding reformation by leaving people to their own inclinations, slaves to their wealth like the rich young ruler of Matthew 19.