

Wait Till I Get My Money Right

Week 5

Good morning. We're in our final week of this series.

And let me just say, as I look back on the last month so far, it's been evident to me that Jesus is at work in us to help us think through this topic. As I've sat down with a number of engaged couples in our church, this series has been timely for them. I think about how over the last few weeks, my wife and I have sat in on a number of LifeGroups - and there's been a lot of fruitful conversations around stewarding our money and it seems like the Spirit has been convicting us of certain spending habits. So all that to say, Jesus is at work and I don't want us to ever take that for granted.

If you have a Bible we're going to be in 2 Corinthians 8-9.

And as you're turning there, earlier on in our series we talked about the vision God has for our resources. What are the big categories for how to think about money? And we said those categories are for provision, for enjoyment, and for blessing others. So today I want us to unpack that last bit - blessing others. Or to say it a bit differently, I want us this morning to think about the topic of biblical generosity.

This is a topic we have to really dig into because when it comes to money and how to use it - the world often tells us messages that are contrary to the sort of abundant, life-flourishing vision that the Bible talks about. And I would argue, this topic is probably the biggest point of difference.

And let me go ahead and say, just to disarm us a bit on this topic. If you grew up around church, when it comes to this topic it can feel...icky or a mini-guilt trip. And so you know, that's not my heart and I don't want us to go on that trip because I don't find those to be too helpful. Rather I want us today to get us in a place of gratitude and excitement when it comes to generosity.

So I've got four points that I want to go ahead and share with you when it comes to generosity. Those points are the heart of generosity, the challenge of generosity, the result of generosity, and the source of generosity. [I'll repeat those again for our note takers.] If I were a better Baptist they'd all start with the same letter but what are you gonna do?

1 - Let's look at the first one: the heart of generosity. I'm pulling this from 2 Corinthians 8:1-4

2 Corinthians 8:1-4

We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, 2 for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. 3 For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, 4 begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints

For some context - this is the apostle Paul writing to the church in Corinth. Corinth was a church he planted and then handed off to other leaders so that Paul could then go somewhere else and plant other churches and hand those off to capable leaders and so on and so forth.

And in this section Paul is addressing a need on behalf of the church in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the first church ever planted and severe persecution is going on to the point where people are coming to faith in Jesus and as a result are getting kicked out of their families, and losing their jobs. So Paul is saying, "Hey there's a need right now, and we need your help to make sure people's needs are met and that as a result, more people would come to know Jesus. And to help capture your imagination a bit, let me tell you about how other churches I've planted have responded." And he tells them about the churches in Macedonia - which would have likely been the churches in Phillippi and Thessalonica - of which we have other letters in the Bible from Paul to those people.

But notice what he says when he comes and asks those churches to be generous. Look at that again:

2 Corinthians 8:2-4

their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.
3 For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, 4 begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints

So check out how he describes their financial situation - extreme poverty. I can only speculate what that looked like exactly, and yet Paul says despite this - it translated into an overflow of generosity. They gave beyond their means. And then I love how v.4 talks about it - they were "begging us earnestly...in taking part." Which for me, I can't speak for you, but for me, I don't have a category for this sort of generosity. When you're so caught up in something that you're just begging and pleading with someone else, "Please please take my money. Give me one sec. The ATM is just around the corner. Please do not go anywhere."

Which poses the question: what on earth would have compelled these churches - who financially weren't busting at the seams per se - to have this sort of generosity? And the answer is their heart. It says they had an abundance of joy in themselves. And here's a fun detail - that word abundance in v.2 is the word *perriso* - which is the same word Paul uses to describe their generosity in the same verse. Our translations say they had "overflowed" in wealth - it's the same word *perriso*. So a more literal translation is their abundance of joy (led to) an abundance of generosity. Paul wants the church to connect the dots here: your generosity is a reflection of your heart.

When you love what God loves, that will translate into being generous towards the things that God cares about. And what does God care about? He cares about His Kingdom coming down to Earth. He cares about people being rescued from darkness and brought into the light. He cares about the poor and the widow and the outcast. He cares about His love and rule and reign spreading throughout the world. And part of God's desire for you is to love the things that He loves. He's after your heart and transforming. That's part of maturing and growing into a mature disciples of Jesus. And that includes whether or not you're sacrificially generous.

And the churches in Macedonia, Paul says, had a heart that was so abundant and overflowing that they saw this crisis in Jerusalem as an opportunity to further love the things that God loves. They were so eager to see God's Kingdom come - that they were eager to give. They wanted to share whatever they could so that more people would encounter Jesus.

I know I shared this illustration a couple of weeks ago, but it's the best one I can think of when it comes to this. Right now, I've got three young kids with very active imaginations who love to play with toys and color and draw comic books and it's so fun seeing them play. And at times, there will be moments when they will begin to argue over their stuff. They're coloring and one of them wants the red marker that someone else is using so they snatch it out of their hands or they end up having some tug of war over a stuffed animal. And then I have to come in and settle it, and it usually ends with me taking the toy away completely.

But when they share. Oh man, it's the sweetest thing. When I see my son playing with a toy and the other says "Can I play with that?" And he says, "Yeah sure." And then he'll play with something else or even better he'll get something else and begin playing with her after he just gave her a toy. Oh shoot - it's like - I think at this moment, right now for the next 30 seconds, I think I won parenting. Let's soak this moment in. Cue the music from Rocky.

Because it's not that I want them to share just to give them a rule to follow. I'm trying to go after their hearts for them to see the added joy that comes when they decide to share.

In those moments when they give their stuff to the other, something is actually shifting in their hearts. To realize none of their stuff is theirs, it's all God's. That they live in a world of abundance, not scarcity. And they actually receive more joy in the matter when they share their stuff.

And Paul says that's what happened with these churches and I want that for you. For out of an overflow of your heart to share an overflow of your resources so that you can get more and more joy out of it. I want your hearts to become the kind of hearts that look more and more like Jesus, and one of the most significant ways that can happen is through your generosity.

Generosity is part of the maturation process - for you to see "Wait a second, God has given me resources so I can bless others. That's why He's given me this stuff.

On the flip side, people who do not follow this process of maturity that God lays out - end up spiritually stunted. Their hearts aren't able to grow into the type of heart God has in mind. It's like the kid hoarding over his toys, who misses out on all the joy that awaits him.

But to get to that place, isn't going to come naturally to any of us and I would imagine it won't happen easily either.

2 - And that leads me to the next point...the challenge of generosity.

So let's just state the obvious here: living here is expensive. The price of gas, the housing market, the cost of eggs...seems like it keeps getting higher and higher. If you have kids, kids cost money and expenses come up. It's like, I am praying our kids have straight teeth - because braces are expensive.

And you can be a good money manager and keep an eye on where your money goes, and for some, it can still feel like you're just scraping by.

So when the Bible talks about generosity, I think it's natural for defenses to come up and say, "Hey look God, money doesn't grow on trees. I've got my mouth to feed. I've got bills to pay."

And Scripture is not ignorant to this reality. And in fact, Scripture says the way to generosity is not to first make sure you're living sustainably and meeting a certain amount - rather Scripture says the way towards generosity is to trust God with your resources by first giving towards Him. And when we do, you realize Your Heavenly Father will take care of you.

The best illustration I can think of is this: it's like biblical generosity is a trust fall. Have you ever done that? I'll go ahead and tell you - those were maybe my least favorite things to do. I'd rather do anything else than do one of those, which may be more about me, but it's fine, I'm fine. But I remember when you first do a trust fall, you're freaking out, you keep looking over your shoulder. You're making eye contact with the person saying "You're gonna catch me right? You better catch me. I'm serious." And then you take a deep breath and you lean into the fall. And for that split second it seems like time stands still and you're like "no no no" and then in an instant - those arms come out and you're caught, free from the danger. And I tell you what - even though I didn't want to do it at first, I'm so thankful for that person that they caught me. There's a reason why that exercise exists - it's to build trust with the person who catches you.

And in a lot of ways biblical generosity is like that, it's a regular trust building exercise. It's a trust fall every time you write the check or the automated giving happens. It's this posture of saying, "I don't know God. You're gonna catch me right? You better catch me. I'm serious." And that's what He does - every single time.

This is why in the Old Testament the tithe existed. The nation of Israel was commanded, when you pull in your crops - give your first and your best to God at the altar. It was God's way of saying, "Trust me and I'll catch you. Just watch." And back then, that would have been a radical sacrifice - in part, because ancient Israel was an agrarian culture - they relied on their crops. That was their number one resource. If a drought came and they couldn't grow any more crops - they're in huge trouble now. Their whole society would cease to exist if the rains don't come and the crops don't grow. And yet, God says, do you see those crops? Give the best to me and watch what happens.

Malachi 3:10

Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.

I both love and am freaked out by this verse. God's saying "Test me. Be generous to me and watch what happens. You think I'm bluffing? Huh?"

And he says when you do not only will I catch you, I'm going to bless you.

Now to be clear: he's not affirming some prosperity gospel here. God's not saying if you give He'll bless you with a Benz or a beach house so let's not twist what Scripture is saying.

But at the same time there is a clear invitation to an act of trust, an act of faith. To come to God with our first and best and say "Here you go" and when you do something happens in you as a result.

2 Corinthians 9:6-8, 11

The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work... 11 You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.

So Paul here is echoing that verse in Malachi 3. God intends for you to trust Him more. The more you give, the more joy you get. The more you see Him at work in you and around you. You do the trust fall and He's going to catch you and bless you.

Again don't get too "prosperity gospel" with it. This is not saying God will give you your dream car but it does mean when you are generous, God frees you from those materialistic things and changes your heart.

When you sow much you will reap much means in a general sense, God tends to bless those who trust Him and walk in generosity. AND in the context it seems to be that the more you give to others, the more God will enable you to give even more. He will encourage your generosity by giving you more seed to cheerfully sow - so it's not about attaining wealth, but on being blessed to continue being a blessing.

And that leads me to the next point...

3 - the result of generosity

Paul goes on and notice what else will happen through their generosity:

2 Corinthians 9:12-15

For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. 13 By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, 14 while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. 15 Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

So what's the result of generosity? The result is: God gets praised, people get helped, we grow. That's a win on all fronts.

In fact, when you look at the early church that's exactly what happens. If you look at Acts 2, Peter gives the first ever Christian sermon that launches the church in Jerusalem. And thousands of people come to faith in Jesus, they begin sharing all their resources, and as a result more people come to faith in Jesus and

God gets all the more glory for it. Something changed in them, down to their core, and transformed how they viewed their stuff.

When you look at church history, this same pattern shows up. One Roman emperor hundreds of years later after Acts 2 said this about how generous the Christians were:

Roman Emperor Julian

It is a scandal that there is not a single Jew who is a beggar, and that the godless Galileans (a.k.a. Christians) care not only for their own poor but for ours as well; while those who belong to us look in vain for the help that we should render them.

In other words, what he's saying is, "Hey man, I have a problem with these Christians and the problem is, they're too generous. They're taking care of everybody and making me look bad." I mean how crazy is it, when our generosity makes nonChristians do a double take at us?

This is why many hospitals in America often have some denominational name at the end of their hospital - because it was the Christians and the churches of the cities that wanted to help people in need and so they gave freely and generously to help make that happen.

And when it comes to finding examples of this, I can't help but think of our church too. When people are hungry, we feed them. When kids need school supplies, we go get them. When our people are struggling financially and can't pay their bills, we put our resources together and figure it out. When people need counseling and can't afford it, we help pay for it. (And when I say "we" I'm talking about the many of "you" who are regularly giving monthly and sacrificially to help meet those needs.)

Every single thing we do here in this building and throughout the city is supported by you all.

- Every time a kid eats their cups full of Goldfish crackers and hears about Jesus at Kidtown, that's made possible because of your generosity.
- Every time someone walks into our church building and drinks a cup of coffee and grabs a handful of mints in the bathroom - and is then welcomed by you all and they encounter God in this space, that's all because of what you give regularly.
- Every time someone confesses sin in a LifeGroup, or wrestles with doubt, or is feeling beat up by life and needs prayer - that all happens because God transformed your heart and you trusted Him with your stuff.

God gets praised, people get helped, and we grow. And it's happening here. Seeds are being planted and it's showing fruit and it's beautiful. God is changing our hearts every single time we release our grip on our resources and give it to God.

And that brings me to my last point...

4 - the source of generosity

Paul addresses the Corinthian church with the opportunity to respond in generosity, and watch how he gets to the very heart of the issue. The foundational thing that will turn us into people of generosity:

2 Corinthians 8:8-9

I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine.

Love that bit from Paul. He's saying "Look I'm not telling you to do anything or coerce you into something you don't want to do. As a pastor who loves you and wants Jesus for you, I want to help you love Jesus more but it's on you whether or not you do it."

There's a sense in which money reveals who we really are. Jesus says "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." And you can say whatever you want about Jesus but money is incredibly revealing to see where your heart truly lies.

And Paul share the source of it all:

9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

You see what Paul does is he tells them about Jesus. He tells them the life-altering story of how the Son of God, the King of all creation, entered into the world and took on human flesh. Who lived a life of poverty so that we might become spiritually rich. Who endured the shame and agony of the Cross so that we might have the abundant life found in Christ. Who conquered death so that He might make us royal sons and daughters of the King.

The only way we get to a place of heart-transforming, joy-filled, generosity is when you see how much generous God was towards you. How he, out of the joy that overflowed in Himself, gave up everything to bring you into the fold.

It's through Jesus' generous love that He brings us in and it's through that love He intends to train us to free up our hearts, our lives, our futures, and even our resources - so that we might experience the blessing of knowing Him more.

(And while I could end the sermon there - I've got a few more quotes I want to share with you... :))

I love how the 19th century minister, Robert M'Cheyne put it when preaching on this passage. He says this:

Robert Murray M'Cheyne

Do you know the grace of Christ? Oh my dear friends, if you would be like Christ, and you pray that you will be, become like him in giving. 'Though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor.'

Objection: 'My money is my own.'

Answer: Christ might have said, 'My blood is my own; my life is my own,' and then where would you be?

Objection: ‘But many people in need are undeserving.’

Answer: Christ might have looked at you and said, ‘Look at these wicked rebels, should I lay down my life for these? No, I will give to the good angels and the deserving poor.’ But no, he left the ninety-nine sheep, and came after the lost. He gave his blood to the undeserving.

Objection: ‘But people who I give my money to might abuse it.’

Answer: Christ might have said the same thing, with far greater truth. Christ knew thousands would trample his blood under their feet, that most would despise it, that many would make his blood an excuse for sinning more; yet he gave his own blood.

My dear Christians if you want to be like Christ, give much, give often, give freely even to the vile and the undeserving. Christ is glorious and happy, and so shall you be. It’s not your money I want; it’s your happiness. Remember his own words, ‘It’s more blessed to give than to receive.’

Conclusion

So that’s it. That’s the heart, the challenge, the result, and the source of generosity. This is the opportunity Paul gave the Corinthians to embrace, and the one set before us today.

- I know that we have a large array of people in the room. I know we have some very generous people who give to a lot of things: our church, missionaries, ministries, needs that arise.
- I know we probably have some who do not know Jesus yet and are scratching their heads at some of this.
- And I imagine we have some people who are believers in Jesus but who like the Corinthians, do not yet excel in this area. Who are just starting their character transformation in this regard.

I’d like to wrap up today, and our series, with two things. The first is a question, and the second is a thank you.

First, the question. How much should I give? And I’ll go ahead and say quickly to that, “I don’t know.” Here’s what I would say, and I am applying this to me as well. A few weeks back, we talked about how money is used for provision, enjoyment, and blessing. And we asked the same question about the categories of provision and enjoyment. How much should I spend on provision and enjoyment? How much is too much? And we gave the same answer, I don’t know.

But we said, you should definitely be asking that question. And based on where and when you live, it seems a fairly safe bet that you are spending too much on the categories of provision and enjoyment. Not a definite, I don’t know your budget. But at least a probably. Something you should consider.

I would say the same thing about the blessing, or generosity category. How much of your total budget should go to that category? I don’t know. But based on where and when you live, if I had to guess it would be that we don’t put a high enough percentage there. That’s maybe a safe bet for a lot of us. My hunch is that many of us are undergoing it. I like the way CS Lewis says this:

C.S. Lewis

I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc., is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charitable expenditures exclude them.

I know I said something similar a couple of weeks ago, my hope is that we get so compelled by all that could happen through our resources that if someone were to look at your budget and the budget of a non-Christian who made the same amount of money as you do, that they would be thrown off by how you prioritize generosity. They would be like, "This is not a token donation to charity, this is a radically different way of relating to resources." Because you value something better - you value the Kingdom of God and your heart is so overflowing with generosity that even though your standard of living is lower, your quality of life is greater because it's so wrapped up in Jesus and His mission for the world.

Conversely, if they were to look at your budget and not be caught off-guard at all, I'd say that could mean something is off. So that's something worth wrestling with.

That's the question. Now for the thank you.

I know that many of you, for years, have given faithfully and sacrificially to our church in addition to other things that you give to, I simply want to end our time by saying "Thank you." God is changing you and it's beautiful and so much fruit has come and will continue to come through it.

In fact, next Sunday this is what we're going to witness and celebrate. For those of us that tithe and give sacrificially, we're going to witness the impact your generosity is making right here in our city. You're going to see story after story of how Jesus is taking hold of people's hearts. We're going to see kids and adults getting baptized proclaiming "Jesus is Lord" over and over again. You're going to see people go under the waters symbolizing that they have died to their old way of life - and you're going to see them shoot up from the water representing that they are transformed. That they are forever changed because Jesus has saved them.

And I want you to have a smile on your face knowing that even if you don't know some of these people getting baptized - your giving helped to make this happen. The gospel so took root in your heart that it translated over into financial generosity. And we're not saying that as a way for you to brag on yourself, but for you to give glory to God and for your joy to increase - for you to experience the blessing that Jesus is still on the move, even after 2,000 years. He's still making a name for Himself. He's still making His Kingdom known. And what a privilege that we get to be a part of that. Praise God.

Pray

Communion