

Sermon #4: Defined by Generosity

1 Timothy 6:17-19 New International Version (NIV)

17 Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. 18 Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. 19 In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

*Some give freely, yet grow all the richer;
others withhold what is due, and only suffer want.
A generous person will be enriched,
and one who gives water will get water. (Proverbs
11:24-25)*

*Those who are generous are blessed,
for they share their bread with the poor. (Proverbs 22:9)*

God created us with the willingness to give—to God and to others. This design is part of our makeup; we have the *need* to be generous. You are made in the likeness of God – made in His image. God is a giving God. Since Adam God has given – and continues to give – His grace freely given through Jesus. God gives because God loves! Listen to Paul as he closes a letter to the Ephesians in chapter 3.

Ephesians 3 - 14 For this reason I kneel before the Father, 15 from whom every family[a] in heaven and on earth derives its name. 16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that

surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Point #1 – You are created to be generous.

- God gives your power through his Spirit.
- Christ dwells in your heart of faith.
- Why ? – so we together can grasp how wide and long and high is the love of Christ – a love that surpasses knowledge.

Generous with your love – Generous with your forgiveness – Generous with your giving – Generous in giving all that with God has given to you. Something which causes us to be the opposite of generous – maybe it is the daily message we hear on TV the radio, friends which convinces us that we are to live for self.

A local charity realized that it had never received a donation from the town’s most successful lawyer. The young man in charge of contributions called the lawyer to persuade him to contribute: “Our research shows that out of a yearly income of at least \$500,000, but you have not given anything to our charity. Wouldn’t you like to give back to the community in some way?”

The lawyer mulled this over for a moment and replied: “First, did your research also show that my mother is dying after a long illness, and has medical bills that are several times her annual income?”

“Um...no. ... I am sor....”

“Or that my brother, a disabled veteran, is confined to a wheelchair?”

Panic stricken the rep began to stammer out an apology.

“Or that my sister’s husband is in serious condition from an accident,” the lawyer’s voice rising in indignation, “leaving her penniless with three children?!”

“Sir, I had no idea...”

The Lawyer proclaimed “...So, young man – doesn’t it reason - if I didn’t give any money to them, why should I give any money to you?”

This man isn’t giving to anyone – even those who one would assume he would.

Yet there are two voices that “war” against our God-given impulse toward generosity, tempting us to keep or hoard what we have.

The voice of fear. Fear, of what might happen to us, along with a misplaced idea about the true source of our security, keeps us from being generous and leads us to hoard what we have. The truth is that hoarding offers us no real security in this world. Based on our amount of stuff people would be much happier than they are.

The voice of self-gratification. Our culture tells us that our lives consist in the abundance of our possessions and pleasurable experiences. So we find ourselves thinking, *If I give, there won't be enough left for me.*

When we give our lives to Christ, invite him to be Lord, and allow the Holy Spirit to begin changing us from the inside out, we find that our fears begin to dissipate and our aim in life shifts from seeking personal pleasure to pleasing God and caring for others.

We still may wrestle with fear and selfishness, we are able to silence them more readily and effectively the more we grow in Christ. And the more we grow in Christ, realizing that our lives belong to him, the more generous we become.

Point #2 - Generosity is a fruit of spiritual growth.

We are growing as a disciple

- We find more joy in doing things for other people and for God than we ever did in doing things for ourselves. (Acts 20:33-35)

“I have never coveted anyone’s silver or gold or fine clothes. 34 You know that these hands of mine have worked to supply my own needs and even the needs of those who were with me. 35 And I have been a constant example of how you can help those in need by working hard. You should remember the words of the Lord Jesus: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

- In the very act of losing our lives, we find life.

Matthew 16:25 - If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it.

- Acknowledging – it is all God’s.

Psalm 24:1 The world and all its people belong to him. Life is a gift, and everything belongs to God

Where did this whole tithe thing come from?

From the early days of the Old Testament, God’s people observed the practice of giving some portion of the best of what they had to God. A gift offered to God was called the *first fruits* or the *tithe*, and it equaled one-tenth of one’s flocks or crops or income. Abraham was the first to give a tithe or tenth.

Abraham after a great victory gave a tenth of all the goods he recovered - to the priest – He made promises to give a tenth of all he received to give to God. It was added to the law in *Leviticus 27:30-33 - “One-tenth of the produce of the land, whether grain from the fields or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord and must be set apart to him as holy. 31 If you want to buy back the Lord’s tenth of the grain or fruit, you must pay its value, plus 20 percent. 32 Count off every tenth animal from your herds and flocks and set them apart for the Lord as holy. 33 You may not pick and choose between good and bad animals, and you may not substitute one for another. But if you do exchange one animal for another, then both the original animal and its substitute will be considered holy and cannot be bought back.”*

Giving a tithe.

As Christians who live under the new covenant, we are not bound by the Law of Moses; we look to it as a guide. Yet most Christians agree that the tithe is a good guideline for our lives, and one that is pleasing to God.

Though tithing can be a struggle, it is possible at virtually every income level. If you cannot tithe right away, take a step in that direction. Perhaps

you can give 2 percent or 5 percent or 7 percent. God understands where you are, and God will help you make the adjustments necessary for you to become more and more generous.

Giving beyond the tithe.

Tithing is a floor, not a ceiling. God calls us to grow beyond the tithe. We should strive to set aside an additional percentage of our income as offerings for other things that are important to us, such as mission projects, schools, church building funds, and other nonprofit organizations.

From the earliest biblical times, the primary way people worshipped God was by building an altar and offering the fruit of one's labors upon it to God.

They would burn the sacrifice of an animal or grain as a way of expressing their gratitude, devotion, and desire to honor God. The scent of the offering was said to be pleasing to God. It wasn't that God loved the smell of burnt meat and grain. Rather, God saw that people were giving a gift that expressed love, faith, and the desire to please and honor God; and this moved God's heart. When given in this spirit, our offerings bless the Lord.

Point 3- Giving in love, faith and honor to God – moves God's heart.

Luke 6:38 Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

How Our Generosity Affects Us

Through It Our Hearts Are Changed

When we are generous—to God and to our families, friends, neighbors, and others who are in need—our hearts are filled with joy. They are enlarged by the very act of giving. When we give generously, we become more generous.

In It We Find the Blessings of God (Malachi 3:10)

10 Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.

Many Christians have it wrong. They say that if you give, then God will give more back to you. But that is not how it works. We do not give to God so that we can get something in return. The amazing thing is that when we give to God and to others, the blessings just seem to come back to us. Of course, there is no guarantee that if you tithe you will never lose your job or never have other bad things happen to you. Nevertheless, when we give generously, the unmistakable blessings of God flow into our lives.

APPLES!!!!