

I want to begin this morning with a word association: what comes to mind when you hear the word “*generous*”? It’s a word that is used in so many different contexts. We might speak about being generous with one’s words: generous with respect to encouragement and affirmation. Or we might speak about being generous with one’s money, time, skills, or abilities. We might speak about a generous act of love and kindness.

Or one might speak about a generous helping of blueberry pie. On Thursday night, I was a part of a meeting that took place at Julie Jamieson’s house, and she had baked a blueberry pie for us to enjoy. I couldn’t help but notice that she gave me the biggest helping--and I liked it!

The dictionary defines generosity as “showing a readiness to give more of something than is strictly necessary or expected”.

I’ve already asked what comes to mind when you hear the word “generous,” but perhaps the better question is: who comes to mind when you hear the word “*generous*”? Generosity is better seen than explained.

**illus:** I had a friend that I used to golf with when I lived in Calgary, and the best way to describe his golf game is by using the word “*generous*”--let’s just say that my friend was very “*generous*” when it came to marking the scorecard. We would tee off and make our way down the fairway--sometimes we hit the fairway, many more times we did not. And so, we would go back and forth across the fairway,

like a sailboat tacking on the ocean, and eventually we would get to the green and sink our putt.

I usually marked the scorecard, and so I would ask my friend, “*what did you shoot on the last hole?*” His typical response would go something like this: “*why don’t you put me down for a 5?*” And I’d think to myself, “*why don’t I put you down for an 8, because that’s what you actually shot.*” My friend was generous when it came to remembering his score.

Who do you know that you would describe as generous? Maybe you would point to a friend or a parent, to a teacher, a small group leader, a coach, or to a community. But wherever you see generosity, know this: what you are seeing is a reflection of God’s being.

Generosity is one of God’s essential characteristics and humanity has been made in His image. All humanity, to varying degrees, reflects the image and likeness of God: our relationality, our ability to choose, our ability to desire, the inward inclination towards love, justice, goodness--all of this is a part of what it means to be made in God’s image.

One doesn’t need to be a Christian in order to be generous, but all generosity ultimately finds its source in God. The Bible tells us that God is love, that God is holy, that God is kind, and the fusion of these results in a generosity that sustains the world.<sup>1</sup>

All of God’s creative acts are the overflow of His generosity; God is the One Being in whom there is no compulsion--there is no “should” or “must” in God. All that God does, all that He gives is given freely,

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<sup>1</sup> God is love (1 John 4:16); God is holy (Isaiah 6:3); God is kind (Titus 3:4-5).

willingly, intentionally for the sake of others. God didn't create the world because He was bored, lonely, or needy--creation was an act of loving generosity--He created that we might enjoy Him and all that He has made. God is the definition of generosity because more than any other, He is ready to give more than necessary or expected.

We don't have to look any further than the Lord Jesus Christ to see that God doesn't hold anything back when it comes to giving. Listen to these words, found in Titus 3:3-7,

*“3 At one time we...were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. 4 But—“When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, 5 He saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. 6 He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior. 7 Because of His grace He declared us righteous and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life.”*

Generosity begins with God; He gives more than we could expect, more than we deserve. He offers us forgiveness, love, and new life not because we have earned them--we have not--His generous invitation flows from His mercy.

I wonder, for those here today, have you accepted God's invitation? Have you received the forgiveness, the love, the new life that is found through Jesus Christ? When Jesus died, He died for my sin, for your sin, for the sin of the world, that we might be reconciled to God. If you have not accepted God invitation before, make today the day.

*It's as simple as saying, God, I'm in need of a new life and a fresh start. I know I need to be washed clean, and I know that I can't make myself clean any more than I can make myself new--I need You. Jesus, thank you for giving your life for me on the cross, thank you for bearing the punishment for my failures, my selfishness, and my sin--please forgive me.*

*Jesus, all I have to offer You is all of me. Take my life and fill me with Your life, with Your thoughts and desires--lead me in Your way. Amen.*

Generosity begins with God, but it's not meant to end there; we've been created and redeemed that we might reflect God's generosity in the world. We were made to image Him, to act like a mirror, but a mirror like no other...God's intent is that when people see us they will see through us to Him...not that we are insignificant, but that we point to something, Someone, far greater than ourselves.

Two ancient Christian theologians, Irenaeus and Athanasius, captured this idea in the following way. They said that God the Son became what we were, that we might become what He is. Jesus took on our humanity, that we might be redeemed, reconciled, and restored to God's image--that we might live as He lives, that we might reflect the Father's glory as He does.

Generosity begins with God, but it's not meant to end there--the word is **GENEROUS**. Over the next 4 weeks we're going to be looking at the subject of generosity with respect to the way we spend our time, the way we use our talents, abilities, gifts, and the way we handle our money.

Over the past three weeks we have been talking about God's architecture, God's design for sex and sexuality. In talking with many of you, I know that many have come to the conclusion that they want a different relationship to sex than the one they currently have. In the same way, I want to talk with you this morning about having a different relationship to money than the one you might currently have.

Last week Pastor Keith and I answered questions from the floor about sex and sexuality, but we began by looking at Hebrews 13:4. Let's return to this text for a moment to set the stage for what I'm going to say this morning.

*"4 Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. 5 Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." Hebrews 13:4-5*

In the same breath, the writer of Hebrews moves from talking about sex to talking about money--does that strike anyone as odd? What's the link between the two? Perhaps just this: money and sex are two of the grand pursuits of humanity, two of the most dangerous pitfalls, two of the most bewitching idols.

I have found that sex and money are seldom talked about in the Canadian church; we tend to think of these subjects as being "off limits," personal and private--we adopt an internal "*don't ask, don't*

*tell*" policy. And yet, as far as God is concerned these subjects aren't a matter of private conviction.

Did you know that Jesus said more about money than He did about heaven and hell combined? More than 15% of His teaching was on the subject of money and possessions. Randy Alcorn writes, "We may try to divorce our faith from our finances, but God sees them as inseparable."<sup>2</sup>

The truth is that we are invited to live in God, and God in us, so much so, that He determines the shape and practice of our sexuality, in the same way that He shapes how we think about and handle money.

So far this morning, what I have offered to you is a long introduction to our series on Generosity, and specifically, to being generous when it comes to our money and possessions. In some respects, content-wise, I've already said all that I'm going to say, but what I'd like to do now is to go over the same ground once more and then conclude by sharing with you how God has been shaping my relationship to money and possessions.

Here are the two thoughts I want you to walk away with before you leave this morning:

### **1. First, generosity begins with God.**

If you recall, a few minutes ago I was talking with you about the gospel, about Jesus taking on our humanity, and dying on the cross to

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<sup>2</sup> Alcorn, *The Treasure Principle*, 8.

reconcile humanity to God. You may be sitting in church and thinking to yourself, “*What does the gospel have to do with money?*”

In 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, Paul writes a kind of magnum opus when it comes to generosity, giving, and money; in these chapters, Paul roots our financial generosity in the cross of Jesus Christ.

Let me offer some brief context. Jerusalem had been hard-hit by a financial crisis of some sort. We aren’t told the details, but what is clear is that Paul was taking up a collection among the churches of Asia Minor and these monies were to be used to ease the suffering of the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem.

Let me encourage you to turn with me to 2 Corinthians 8, starting at verse 1.

*“And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. 2 In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. 3 For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, 4 they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord’s people.*

*7 But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving...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 through his poverty might become rich.”*

Generosity--giving--begins with God. Though Jesus was rich--living at the right hand of God the Father, the place of praise, honour, glory, power, and wealth--He became poor for our sake. The Son of God left the splendour of heaven and took on our flesh. Jesus voluntarily took on our physical limitations and weaknesses. He opened Himself to being misunderstood, marginalized, and maligned. He endured persecution, suffering, and death.

Tim Keller, in his book “Counterfeit God’s,” writes: “Jesus...had infinite wealth, but if he had held on to it, we would have died in our spiritual poverty. That was his choice--if he stayed rich, we would die poor. If he died poor, we would become rich. Our sins would be forgiven, and we would be admitted into the family of God.”<sup>3</sup>

He gives more than we deserve. He offers us forgiveness, love, and new life not because we have earned them--we have not--but because it is in His nature to be generous. The second thought I want you to take with you this morning is that...

**2.** Generosity begins with God, but it’s not meant to end there--remember, our word for the next 4 weeks is **GENEROUS**. We’ve been created and redeemed that we might reflect God’s generosity in His world.

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<sup>3</sup> Keller, 67.

In verse 7, Paul writes, *“But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.”*

We love God because He first loved us. We give because He gave, and gave, and gave, and still gives. We don't give because we have to, we give because He gives, and we are being shaped by the Spirit that might live as He lives. Every time we give, we participate in His life; every time we give, we reflect His generosity.

At this point I'd like to share with you some of my own journey when it comes to thinking about, and handling, money and possessions. The metaphor of “journey” is certainly the right one, because giving is something I have been growing in since I was a small boy. It doesn't matter when you begin this journey, what matters is that you entrust what you've been given to God and let Him lead you where ever He chooses.

Nearly everything I've ever learned about giving, I first learned from my mom and dad--it wasn't until later that I understood that their convictions were rooted in God's generosity. If I had to summarize my parents financial practices, I was do so by saying that their spending habits were frugal but their giving patters were generous. Of all the things they modeled for me, there are few things I am more grateful for.

As soon as I was old enough to start doing chores, I started getting an allowance--4 dollars a month. To a six-year-old, in 1979, \$4 a month was like winning the lottery--hockey cards were 25 cents a pack, Double Bubble gum was 2 cents a piece--\$4 a month was enough for

a six year old to live like a king. But my parents did more than just hand over this money; they shaped how I thought about it, and what I did with it.

They taught me to follow the Old Testament practice of tithing, that is, to give the first 10% of whatever I earned back to God. I learned that my “gift” wasn't about making sure that God could pay His bills, it was the way God had prescribed to honour Him for giving us everything. In giving the 10%, I was was learning to trust God for the 100%.

While I was learning to give 10%, I was also learning by watching my parents give even more. I'd watch my dad write a cheque to the church and put it in an offering envelope. Mom and dad would invite missionaries over to our house for dinner and we'd hear the stories of the work they were doing to tell unreached people about Jesus, and these stories prompted even more giving.

When dad got his tax return from the government every year, he always gave part it away--to the church, to missionary organizations, to those in need. Sometimes my parents sold something that they owned and then gave the money away. My parents gave, and I watched.

I grew up with the understanding that God is a giving God, and that His people are giving people. And it wasn't just the money--my parents were as generous with their time and their talents as they were with their money.

If someone's roof needed to be fixed, or brakes needed to be replaced, my dad was on it, working for free so that he could heap

blessing on someone. My mom was an incredible florist--she put together floral arrangements for weddings that were breathtaking, and she never took a dime for any of her work. She was also master seamstress--I can't count the amount of times she hemmed someone's dress or pants.

In fact, when Dave Sattler was fresh out of Bible College, he was hired at the church our family attended: Surrey Alliance Church. And any time Dave needed a pair of pants hemmed, or a free haircut, he would call up my mom and come over for a visit. My mom loved Dave and Joanne, and she loved to serve.

As I got older, I found the same joy in generosity that my parents did. But along the way I discovered that the Bible had a lot more to say about money and possessions than simply tithing. While the Old Testament has clear, specific commands about how much a person should give, in the New Testament, specific requirements for giving are less prominent. But in the place of these specific requirements, a different ethic was held forward--*the ethic of generosity*.

And when I discovered that, I made a decision: 10% could remain the floor for my giving minimum, but it didn't have to be the ceiling--and with the Lord's help, it hasn't been. Rather than seeking to grow our income, Naomi and I have been seeking to grow our giving.

I know to many, that sounds backwards--it sounds foolish in our money-crazed-culture, but we've found joy in giving. When it comes to financial generosity, I've come to understand that our problem is not so much that we don't know God's design, our problem is that we're not utterly convinced that choosing God's design will lead to life. But Naomi and I are utterly convinced--by Scripture, by the

Spirit, and by personal experience--that giving generously ushers a person into the abundant life God promises.

We've done all kinds of things with respect to giving since we have been married. Let me share just a few examples. Every year Naomi and I get a tax return, and every year we ask the Lord how much of it He wants us to give to the church, to missionary organizations, or to people we know who are in need.

During the last six years on the North Shore, my car has been crumpled twice in motor vehicle accidents, neither of which were my fault. On both occasions, God prompted us to take our settlement and give it all away--it wasn't money we weren't counting on and so it wasn't money we needed.

A number of years ago, at my former church, the leadership made a decision to buy land and build a new building. And as Naomi and I prayed about what to give, we sensed God saying two things to us: (1) Keep up with our previous giving commitments, in other words, give more than we were already giving; and (2) Be generous.

In the end we made a three year commitment to a specific number that amounted to us giving between 25 and 30% of our income. We didn't know where we were going to find the money; we didn't have it in savings, and we weren't expecting big salary increases anytime soon. But the Lord provided: Naomi got some extra shifts, I had a little unexpected income and we began to chip away.

But just over a year into our financial commitment, I felt God's call to resign from the church, and we made plans to move to the North Shore. We began to wrap up our life in Calgary, we said goodbyes to people, and put our house up for sale. But as we drew things to a

close, we had a decision to make about whether we were going to honour our financial commitment.

No one was going to think badly of us if we didn't follow through, after all, we were leaving the church all and starting a new life 1000 km away. But as we prayed about what to do, we sensed God saying "be generous." At God's prompting we honoured our commitment in full by giving some of the proceeds from the sale of our house--and God gave us joy in giving.

When we left to move to the North Shore, a number of people in the church decided to give us a financial gift to help pay for the Masters Degree I was embarking on at Regent College. Would you believe me if I told you that the gift they gave us was larger than the financial commitment we honoured?

It was humbling to think that we might have missed God's blessing if we had clung to the money instead of releasing it to Him. It's as Anne Frank once said, "No one has ever become poor by giving."<sup>4</sup>

Generosity begins with God, but it's not meant to end there--we've been created and redeemed that we might reflect God's generosity in the world.

Perhaps this is the first time you've considered what it means to be generous with what God has entrusted to you--money, time, abilities. I want to invite us to be prayerful in the next 4 weeks--let's ask God to grow us in generosity, and whatever He tells us to do, let's do it.

As the worship team comes to lead us in a final song or two, I want to conclude with the final words from 2 Corinthians 9. Paul wraps up two chapters on the subject of giving with these words: "**15** *Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!*" God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son--we give because He gave, and continues to give, and give, and give. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

### **Worship**

### **Benediction:**

Romans 11:35-36, "*Who has ever given to God, that God should repay them?*" **36** For **from him** and **through him** and **for him** are all things. *To him be the glory forever! Amen.*"

May God's generosity mark your life in deeper and deeper ways.

### **Prayer Ministry**

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<sup>4</sup> Anne Frank, as quoted by Willard and Sheppard, *Contagious Generosity*, 137.