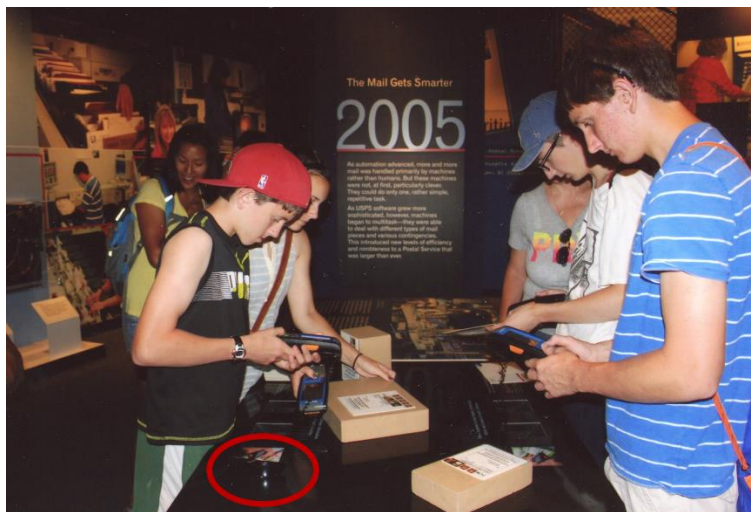


PART SIX
GENEROSITY



STEWARDSHIP

MAXIMIZING GOD'S BLESSINGS FOR HIS GLORY
& OUR BENEFIT



This morning we pick up on part two on the topic of generosity. Ethan reminded me of a something that happened when we had a family vacation out east in 2013. As kids tend to do, they save up their money for vacations and then plan to spend it like water when they get there. Ethan became semi-obsessed with getting a particular pair of sunglasses. He wasn't planning on spending a lot of money because he didn't have a lot of money, but he knew what he wanted. It seemed that

every time we stopped for gas or a bathroom break, there was Ethan checking out the sunglasses. Finally he bought what he thought was the ideal set of sunglasses. he was quite happy with them but didn't have them long. He lost them at the Post Office museum in D.C. He realized that he lost them there so we went back to look for them. We all spread out and thoroughly searched every place we had been in that museum but we never found them. When we got home and were looking through our family photos, there in a photo of the museum, we saw Ethan's sunglasses sitting in a corner. Ethan reminded me of this story and said, in so many words, that it shows the futility of seeking after earthly treasures.

We all seek earthly treasure to some degree which is why we need to continually realign ourselves to the Biblical standard. Before we jump into this message, let me remind you of our definition of stewardship: Maximizing God's blessings for his glory and our benefit. Our problem is that we tend to think of God's glory and our benefit as being two distinct things. if we bring glory to God we think that it will probably entail some kind of loss or sacrifice on our end.

So if God gets glory, we lose out. But that's not right at all. Whatever bring glory to God is always a benefit to us and nowhere is this more obvious than with the topic of generosity.

Before I review the principles from part one, let me ask you a basic math question. If you have \$10,000 and you give \$1,000 to the Lord's work, how much do you have left? Straight up math would tell you that you only have \$9,000. At the end of the message I'll tell you the answer.

Here are the first three principles from two weeks ago.

1. Generosity reminds us that God owns it all.
2. Generosity impacts all areas of stewardship.
3. Generosity is ministry for the saints.

4. Generosity is encouraged by pledges, commitments and reminders.

The majority of chapter eight and nine of 2 Corinthians are all about this collection for the believers in Jerusalem. if you read both chapters you will see that they are a single unit, the same topic. Here's the order of events.

The believers in the church at Corinth pledged to give to the saints in Jerusalem. From this map you can see that Corinth is located in the region of Achaia. therefore, every time Paul mentions Achaia he is referring to the church in Corinth, the one to which this letter is addressed. This pledge is what Paul is referring to in the first few verses.



Now it is superfluous for me to write to you about the ministry for the saints, 2 for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year. So the Corinthians pledged to give to the church in Jerusalem. But more than a year has passed and the Corinthians had not fulfilled their pledge. So Paul reminded them about their pledge but at the same time, he implied that he did not need to remind them. He told them that he knows they are ready and have been ready. So in one sense, Paul was confident that the Corinthians would fulfill their pledge.

But on the other hand, he wasn't so sure, for look what he wrote next.

And your zeal has stirred up most of them. 3 But I am sending the brothers so that our boasting about you may not prove empty in this matter, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be. 4 Otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated—to say nothing of you—for being so confident. 5 So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift you have promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, not as an exaction.

This is fascinating to me. he begins this chapter by saying it is *it is superfluous for me to write to you about the ministry for the saints*. First, I love the fact that the ESV gave us the word 'superfluous.' It just means that Paul thought it completely unnecessary to remind them of their

gift. But then look at the reminders he proceeded to give! He did not want to be humiliated if the Corinthians failed to fulfill their commitment. He also warned the believers in Corinth that they also would be humiliated if they failed.

That's a strong word, don't you think? During my two message son evangelism I made a very strong point that I did not want to motivate you by shame and guilt. Shame and guilt are far too common sources of motivation by Christian leaders. Anyone in a leadership position, including parents, can fall into this trap. For some reason, it seems easier to motivate people through negative means. I could yell and scream at you and lay the heaviest of guilt trips on you and it would bring results. In some churches, that is their weekly medicine. Parents, it can seem that yelling at your kids is the only possible remedy for motivating them to action. It seems to work, doesn't it parents? Believe me, I've been there way too many times. And in the short term, they do 'work.'" But power plays, shame and guilt do not work over the long haul and they are far more damaging than any short term results will bring.

The same is true with using shame and guilt as motivations in the church. Which is why it is important that we understand Paul's use of the word "humiliation." First, we need to understand more of the context of the story. Paul wrote, *And your zeal has stirred up most of them.* Do you see what happened? Paul told the Macedonians about the pledge from the Corinthians. So first the Corinthians pledged to give and then Paul used their commitment to spur on the believers in Macedonia. And based on how he describes the situation here, he probably was enthusiastic about it. He probably said something like this to the Macedonians. "Have you heard about the generosity of the Christians in Corinth? They gave a huge pledge for the suffering believers in Jerusalem. They dug deep and gave beyond their ability to give."

That's the way it must have been for Paul to have said, *your zeal has stirred up most of them.* The Corinthians were zealous to give. They were eager to give and they pledged to give generously. We all know how stories of sacrifice inspire us to do certain things. This is why the story of the widow who gave her last two copper coins is recorded in the Bible. The story is so well known that it has become somewhat of a cliché. "Oh, the poor old woman who have her last two pennies." But it should not be cliché or too familiar, but it should be inspiring, [much like this video](#).

The handful of rice ministry is like an army of poor widows giving almost all that they have. We should inspire one another to give generously. Have you ever inspired or encouraged another believer through your personal walk with the Lord? Most of you probably have, whether or not you realize it. I had someone tell me that they were encouraged by our six young adults who are taking missions trips to five different locations around the world. They made the comment that often teens go on missions trips only if their best friends can go with but that these youth are going in five different directions. They were quite encouraged by their dedication and commitment. The point is that if we can inspire others in other spiritual ways, why not through our giving?

I have never done this before, but in an attempt to inspire each person, on the screen I will quickly scroll through every church family and list how much they gave to the church last year. (Show family names on powerpoint and wait for a long moment) Did I scare you? ;-) Let me be

clear that I would NEVER do such a thing. As I have often said, I have no idea what anyone in this church gives-ever. I know some churches and denominations who still publish information like this. We would never do this but I still believe in the principle of our zeal in giving stirring others to action, as Paul wrote. Listen to how the example of the Corinthians inspired the Macedonians.

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 saint (2 Corinthians 8:1-4).

So the zeal of the Corinthians inspired the Macedonians to give out of their extreme poverty. But then the Corinthians had yet to fulfill their promised gifts. This is why Paul used the word humiliation. yes, it is a strong word and he certainly meant it to move them to action but not in a shameful way. It was a very serious and pointed reminder to fulfill their promise because so much was hinging on it. Imagine if the Macedonians found out that the Corinthians did not fulfill their promise? It would harm their faith and probably cause many of them to do the same.

The point is that there is a strong Biblical precedent for pledges and reminders to give. Except for the capital campaign for the building, we have never done pledge cards or envelopes, but Paul did use a pledge system of sorts. many of you are familiar with the amazing faith of men like George Mueller and Hudson Taylor. Mueller never asked for money for his orphanages but completely relied on prayer of God's provision. Taylor didn't ask for money either but at least he would inform people of his need. without in any way discounting the great faith of these two pioneers, their models are not Biblically mandated. It is OK to make pledges and make commitments to give and to give out reminders regarding your commitments. Doing so is a form of shepherding and leads believers to greater faith and spiritual growth. These are as much a tool of personal and corporate sanctification as anything else.

5. Generosity is a grace decision, not bound by law.

The question that Christians ask is "how much should I give?" Two weeks ago I mentioned *The Treasure Principle* by Randy Alcorn. I have always liked this quote. "Tithing is the training wheels of giving." Alcorn's point is that if you really want to learn to give sacrificially, then giving 10% of your income is just the beginning.

Many churches and Christians use the tithe as a standard for giving. I like this quote as it is thought provoking and challenging but I am not going to defend the tithe as the standard for New Testament believers. Therefore, this morning I am announcing that no one has to tithe their income. As this principle states, Generosity is a grace decision that is not bound by law. However...however, that doesn't mean you are released from being generous. That would make for a horrible message on generosity, wouldn't it? "Nah, don't worry about giving." I am certainly not saying that.

What the Bible does present could be called grace giving. Verse seven is a key verse. *Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*

I came upon something this week that made me want to be a Southern Baptist. ;-) Listen to this description of stewardship that is contained within their doctrinal statement.

“God is the source of all blessings, temporal and spiritual; all that we have and are we owe to Him. Christians have a spiritual debtorship to the whole world, a holy trusteeship in the gospel, and a binding stewardship in their possessions. They are therefore under obligation to serve Him with their time, talents, and material possessions; and should recognize all these as entrusted to them to use for the glory of God and for helping others. According to the Scriptures, Christians should contribute of their means *cheerfully, regularly, systematically, proportionately, and liberally* for the advancement of the Redeemer’s cause on earth”¹

You really cannot defend tithing Biblically, but you can defend giving "*cheerfully, regularly, systematically, proportionately, and liberally* for the advancement of the Redeemer’s cause on earth." Let me give you the last principle and the last section of this passage which will show you the truthfulness of this stewardship statement.

6. Generosity always causes less to be more.

6 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. 9 As it is written, “He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.”

After I was saved at age 16, the church I attended quoted from verses 6-7 every week before the offering was given. You may have heard sermons on the topic of giving cheerfully and happily but we really miss the power of sowing and reaping. First, let me give a disclaimer. This sowing and reaping language has been stolen by the prosperity theology people. So even if it reminds you of their heretical and dangerous beliefs, I hope you know me well enough by now to know that I abhor prosperity theology. But that's the thing about false teaching. It has enough truthfulness embedded in it so that it can deceive people. if it did not, hardly anyone would buy into it. So that's my disclaimer, OK?

I love how Paul starts in verse six-*The point is this*. That's our cue to listen carefully, isn't it? He is not saying that what came before was irrelevant. But he is saying that what comes next is the summary of this whole chapter. I would argue that it is the summary of chapters eight and nine.

Let's just take the summary statement. *whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully*. What is the subject of sowing and reaping? It's giving, right? The principle of sowing and reaping had endless applications, but in this

context, Paul was referring to giving and generosity, so I will limit my comments to the subject at hand.

In context, sowing is giving money. So follow with me. If you give sparingly you will reap sparingly. If you give bountifully you will reap bountifully. Therefore, the more you give, the more you get back. Now do you see why I gave my disclaimer about prosperity theology?!

Right about now some of you are thinking, "Hang on, hang on. I know that that sowing and reaping is Biblical, that much is obvious. But just because you give generously of your money does not mean that God will give you money in return. You might sow money generously but the reaping comes in a different form, not necessarily money." Am I accurately capturing your thought process here? I know exactly what you mean, because if you sow money to get more money, that is the essence of prosperity theology, is it not? So it cannot possibly be true. Let me say it again. Prosperity theology is an oozing scab in the church. I cannot condemn it enough. However, look what Paul write next.

10 He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. 11 You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.

This says that God--the ultimate supplier of all things-- *will supply and multiply your seed for sowing*. Let's review here. What is sowing? Sowing is giving money, and possibly gifts as well, but it's being generous with your treasure. And what do you sow with? You sow with seed, therefore, "seed" equals money. Follow this now. If you sow bountifully, cheerfully, willingly, this verse says that God will supply and multiply what? Your seed. Are you following this? If you are generous with your money God will supply and multiply your money.

But maybe it means that God will take your small gift and multiply it for greater effect on His kingdom. He certainly does mean that but it also says he will *multiply your seed for sowing*. And since you sow with money it clearly says that he will multiply your money. Some of you may be squirming in your seats because on the surface it sounds a little bit too much like prosperity theology. But here is the absolutely enormous difference. Prosperity theology teaches if you give, God will give you money. Usually it's stated much more forcefully. If you give, God will make you rich. Is that what this passage is saying? Most definitely not! It says if you give, God will increase your seed for sowing. In other words, the more you give, the more you will have to give. God is not multiplying your bank account, he is multiplying your giving checks.

Here's the difference. Prosperity theology states: You give to get.
The Bible says: you give to get, in order to give even more.

This is a staggering truth that most Christians fail to grasp. This is why I call this principle: Generosity always causes less to be more. Remember my question from the beginning? If you have \$10,000 and you give \$1,000 to the Lord's work, how much do you have left? I'm I am certainly not making any kind of promises of riches and wealth but I can say, based on this passage, that the answer is not \$9,000. It's more than that because God promises to multiply your seed for sowing.

Many of you have experienced this. You step out in faith and start giving generously to the Lord and things begin to happen. Your car doesn't break down. You get a bigger tax return than you were expecting. There are endless ways that God stretches your money. maybe you won't have *more* money to give but you won't have *less*. You gave what you didn't think you could afford to give and God showed you that you were right. Humanly speaking, mathematically speaking, you could not afford to give what you did. But you did it anyway. You took the Lord at His word and in return he *multiplied your seed for sowing and increased the harvest of your righteousness. You were enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which produced thanksgiving to God.*

But if statistics about giving are right, most of you have not experienced the joy of generous and sacrificial giving. I can imagine the joy of the people in India who give one handful of rice each day. Maybe God multiplies their seed and allows them to give 2 handfuls of rice each day. I don't know how it works for them and I don't know what God will do for you, but I do believe this clear promise. When you give, you get great joy, people are blessed, relationships are developed, faith is strengthened and God is glorified. Don't you want that?

Let me leave you with two quotes from great men of faith who were also insanely generous people.

God delights to increase the faith of His children. We ought, instead of wanting no trials before victory, no exercise for patience, to be willing to take them from God's hands as a means. Trials, obstacles, difficulties and sometimes defeats, are the very food of faith. –George Mueller

"Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can." -John Wesley

Rich Maurer
May 17, 2015

¹ http://www.mbbcirving.org/fileadmin/pdf/MBBC/Baptist_Faith_and_Message.pdf