

The Joy of Generosity

Week 3: Rhythm

1 Cor. 16:1-2

A few weeks ago, one of our receptionists answered the phone and, on the other end of the line was this very *country-fied* voice saying, "I want to talk to the head hog at the trough." Our receptionist was confused and so she asked him "what did you say?" He said a little louder, "I want to speak to the head hog at the trough!"

She realized he was talking about me and said, "Sir, if you want to talk to Shawn, then you need to address him properly. You cannot refer to him as the 'Head Hog at the Trough!' He said, "I'm sorry. I don't mean any offense. I just wanted to give \$10,000 to the church." She said, "Can you hold, please? I think the big pig just walked in!"

Okay, that didn't really happen, but I think it speaks to the stereotype that so many people have. The belief that Churches LOVE money, especially YOUR money! So, people like me are always talking about giving. And, I can't speak for other churches, but I can speak for this one...when we talk about money, it's not because we want something from you, it's because we want something for you.

We make financial decisions every single day. Money is a huge part of our lives. It constantly ranks among the leading causes of stress and anxiety in our relationships. We talk about money because Jesus talked about money. 15% of everything Jesus talked about revolved around money. Not because he wanted to have it, but because he didn't want your money to have ahold of you.

So, we don't talk about money, or generosity, because we want something from you. We talk about it because it matters. It matters to you and it matters to Jesus because our money is a matter of the heart. And we want FOR you to experience freedom from the death grip money can have on your heart. We want FOR you to follow Jesus and surrender every aspect of your life to him, including your financial life. We want FOR you to experience the joy of generosity.

But, there's something inside all of us, whether we want to admit it or not, there's something inside all of us that wants to steal that joy away. It's in our hearts, but we don't like to think it is because it's not a very admirable characteristic. It's something we can easily see in the hearts of others, but have a hard time seeing in ourselves, mostly because we don't want to. You know what it is...it's Greed. The enemy that wages war in our hearts against the joy of generosity is greed.

Greed is such an ugly word, isn't it? It's filled with so many negative connotations. When I think of greed, this is the image that comes to mind...(show picture of the Grinch). The Grinch was one greedy person, right? Even his medical records showed that his heart was 2x too small. Nobody wants to be labeled a greedy person. It's right up there with being prideful, or jealous, or a Purdue fan. Nobody wants to be one of those!

But, we probably all have more greed living in our hearts than we care to admit, or even know. Greed has a way of sneaking into our hearts and settling in. And once it takes root, it becomes really hard to detect and easy to explain away.

So, if money is a matter of the heart, and both generosity and greed are waging war within us, how do we know which one is winning the battle? You look at your generosity. You see, greed can hide in all sorts of places. It can hide in our spending and it can hide in our saving, but greed cannot hide in our generosity. Giving is the only light that can drive out the darkness of greed in our hearts. Or, as Ron Blue told me over lunch a few weeks ago, **"The only way to break the power of greed is to give."**

God knows this, which is why I think he invites us into a rhythm of generosity that is seen from the Old Testament through the New. If you have a Bible, or Bible app you like to use, turn with me to 1 Corinthians 16.

Now, when it comes to studying Scripture, context matters. It's important to know what's said before and after, and how the verses you're studying falls into them. And the context of chapter 16 is that Paul has just spent the previous chapter talking about the resurrection of Jesus and all that it means for us, the Church. After that, he turns his attention to the Church gathering on Sunday mornings to celebrate and remember, to re-create and retell, the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection through singing and preaching and baptism and communion.

So what we see in chapter 16 is that a rhythm of worship, rooted in the resurrection of Jesus, results in a rhythm of generosity. Look at it with me **...(READ 1 Cor. 16:1-3)**

After giving a passionate plea for us to root our lives in the resurrection of Jesus, Paul turns to the rhythm of our generosity that reflects the generous nature of our God. Paul was collecting resources to help the brothers and sisters in Jerusalem who were financially struggling because of their faith in Jesus. Many of them were cut off from their families and communities. They'd lost their jobs, their homes. Paul was collecting money to provide them with some relief and assistance.

So, he says, "When you gather to worship, set aside and amount, **"in keeping with your income."** What does that mean? A common understanding is the tithe. It was a portion of a person's resources set aside for the Lord. The word tithe literally means **a tenth part**. It's 10% of what you have or what you earn.

The rhythm of the tithe was established in the Old Testament. When God's people were about to enter into the Promised Land, a land described as flowing with milk and honey, meaning it was a land rich in resources, as they entered into their new home, it would have been easy for them to put their hope and trust in what they had instead of him, and become greedy. So, to protect their hearts from that greed, God gave them this command in Leviticus 27:30 **...(READ)**

God wanted His people to give one out of every 10 of everything to him. Not because he needed it, but because he wanted their hearts. He didn't want them to start trusting in their resources more than they trusted in Him because our resources will fail us, but He never will. So, throughout the Old Testament, we see the tithe mentioned again and again.

But then we get to the New Testament and tithing is never directly mentioned. Jesus never tells people to give 10% and neither do the New Testament writers. So, some people take that to mean that the tithe is no longer the starting place for generosity and giving. But here's the thing...Jesus always RAISED the spiritual bar, but he never lowered it. To Jesus, the question isn't, "How much do I have to give?" the question is, "How much do I trust God to provide what I need?"

Jesus and the New Testament writers call us to radical generosity. It calls us to a heart that is fully surrendered to God and fully surrenders everything to Him, including our finances. And so, in those times when Jesus does talk about giving, it's not a tenth, or half, or a portion...it's the whole thing! It's holding onto to all of it loosely and using it for the glory of God.

I love how Randy Alcorn puts it in his book *The Treasure Principle*. He says, "Every New Testament example of giving goes far beyond the tithe. However, none falls short of it."

So, why should the tithe...giving 10% of our income...be our *starting point* for generosity, and not the finish line? First, I believe *the rhythm of tithing kills the greed inside our heart*. We start with the tithe because it's an effective, time-tested tool for killing the greed inside our heart. You see, greed and generosity cannot live in the same heart. You will never meet a greedy person who is generous, just like you will never meet a generous person who is greedy. Greed kills generosity, but generosity kills greed. It wins every time!

And I know this first-hand because I've seen it in my own life. When Amber and I got married, I was a greedy person. I didn't give and I wanted stuff to the point that I buried us in debt to get it. But my wife is an incredibly generous person. In fact, I'd say it's one of her spiritual gifts, but my greed was killing her ability to use that gift, so we started practicing generosity together. And, it was hard for me, but over time, her generosity has *mostly* killed the greed inside of my heart. It still pops up from time to time, but one of the tools we use is this rhythm of tithing to Sherwood Oaks.

Our tithe to the Church is the first item on our budgeting app. It's a priority for us, so give online every 2 weeks. That's our rhythm and we stick to it, not out of religious obligation, but because we find so much joy giving to the Lord and what He's doing in and through our Church.

A quick word about our online giving platform...over the past few month, we've had a team of people evaluating all of our financial processes and expenses. One outcome of their efforts was the decision to transition away from Push Pay, our current online platform, to a resource called Secure Give.

By making this switch, we anticipate saving nearly \$18,000 annually in service provider fees. That means, for every \$100 you give online, an additional \$2 will now be available to support our church's mission and ministries, instead of going towards provider fees. That might not sound like much, but that's enough to support one more global mission partner at \$1,500 a month, or fund a more robust counseling ministry through the Church.

So, if you give online, we're going to send you some more details in the next couple of weeks. If you have any questions, Elizabeth Moore, our Business Office Manager, will be down in one of the small rooms outside the Fellowship Hall today and Dec. 3rd. Again, all of this is just so we can be the absolute best stewards we can be of the money you give the Lord here at Sherwood Oaks.

A couple more things as we close... **The rhythm of tithing also produces trust.** We can say that we trust God for all things, but do we actually live like it? A friend told me last week that talk talks and walk talks, but walk talks louder than talk talks. Meaning, what you do means a whole lot more than what you say. Tithing is puts action to our words that we trust God, and then it produces even greater trust as we see Him provide our needs.

Unfortunately, the giving habits of most American Christians show that there's a lot more talk than walk when it comes to trusting God. According to statistics, the average American church goer gives just 2.58% of their income and 25% give nothing at all.

We say that we have trust in a God who loves us and can provide for all of our needs, but our actions are saying something else. Tithing gives us a way of showing God, and the world around us, that we actually believe what we say we believe. I think Satan wants us to keep putting our trust in our resources, and so, like we talked about in my men's group on Wednesday night, **"Giving generously is like punching the devil in the face!"** It's saying I'm going to trust in God a lot more than I trust in what God has given me.

Finally, **the rhythm of tithing involves everyone.** Paul writes his letter to the **church** in Corinth, not to certain individuals, not to the well-to-do's, the church as a whole. And, to the church, made up of people from all backgrounds and socioeconomic levels, **Paul says...(READ vs. 2)**

"Each of you." Generosity involves everyone. It's not just for the wealthy, whom we perceive to have room in their finances to give. It's not just for the uber-spiritual who have incredible faith and trust in God. Generosity involves everyone because God wants each of us to experience the joy that comes when we practice the rhythms of generosity in our lives.

And, when you give, large or small, it all adds up to make a BIG difference. You see, when you give to the Church, you are not just helping pay the bills and keep the lights on. You are funding a mission with eternal significance. And it takes all of us doing our part to succeed.

It's kind of like the Dr. Suess book, *Horton Hears a Who*. My mom's maiden name was Horton, so I grew up with this story, but if you're not familiar with it, it's about an elephant named

Horton who lives in the jungle. As he's walking around one day, a clover flies by and Horton hears a sound from it and discovers there's actually an entire world of people living on this speck. It's a city called Whoville filled with people call Whos. Horton is amazed by this and starts telling everyone else in the jungle about it, but they all think he's out of his mind because they can't hear it.

And the more Horton tries to convince them that there's a world of people living on that speck, the more frustrated everyone gets. Finally, they get so tired of it that they decide to destroy the clover. So Horton tries to get all the Whos in Whoville to yell as loudly as they can, hoping that the people in his world will finally be able to hear the people in their world and save them. Check out this clip...(play Horton Hears a Who clip)

The point is, it was that last voice that enabled the message to be heard and their world was saved. And when we talk about generosity, what a beautiful picture of what we are trying to accomplish together. It might feel like you don't have a whole lot to offer, but I firmly believe that every person's part matters, from the biggest gift to the smallest. It all adds up and empowers the message of Jesus to go out with the power to save people.

And so, together, we can accomplish this. We have nothing better to give our lives to and invest our money in than the Kingdom of God. Our generous God has given us everything we need for salvation through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. And he has invited us into the joy and rhythm of generosity so that more people may hear the Gospel, the good news of Jesus, and be saved.

That takes all of us doing our part. May we all find the joy of this kind of generosity!