

The Paradox of Generosity

Good Morning!

I hope you had a wonderful Thanksgiving, we have much to be Thankful for don't we. And I am thankful to be here with you this morning.

Well, you may have noticed that I am not Shawn, I am Jeff and I am not a minister guy, I am a money guy, a financial advisor and I help people make money with their money.

Let me tell you a story about how I ended up doing what I do. I was 12 years old and mowing lawns and passing newspapers and saving my money at the local credit union and back in the day they were paying 16 to 18% interest and I was looking at the monthly statement and asked my mom what the \$200 in interest was all about. She said that's the money that your money made this month and I said my money made more money than I did this month. It's a beautiful thing when money makes money.

But it is even more beautiful when money makes ministry

- Recap of the Generosity Series (**Maybe show the Series Titles on the Screens?**)
- David Schunk kicked us off with the Heart of Generosity and reminded us of the heart behind the widow's offering, how her gift was significant for what it revealed about her generosity
- In the second week on the Impact of Generosity, Shawn shared that since God owns everything we are really just stewards of all God has entrusted us and we are called to be faithful stewards
- And last week Shawn shared that being a consistent giver helps attack the Weed of Greed in our hearts
- and this week we are talking about The Paradox of Generosity.

Now I doubt that any of you have used the word paradox yet this morning, so let's take a look at the definition

ON SCREENS

Definition of Paradox: a seemingly [absurd](#) or self-contradictory statement or [proposition](#) that when investigated or explained may prove to be well founded or true.

So it's something that sounds ridiculous or unbelievable but turns out to be for real

I have an example of a powerful paradox that changed my life. My assistant Leslie has been working with me for 21 years, God bless her. I can't believe she has put up with me for that long but about 15 years ago Leslie's husband Bruce started losing dexterity and after some tests found out that he had a brain tumor. The doctors gave him 6 months to live but from the time they got the diagnosis, Bruce decided to make the most of the time the Lord had given him. He embraced every day with a positive attitude, and took a genuine interest in everyone that came to visit, so much so that the Hospice nurses fought over who would get to spend time with him. 18 months later, the tumor finally caught up with him and I was with him a couple days before he passed away. He was so weak, he could not sit up in bed, he had lost every ability to do anything for himself and although he could barely talk he said, You know every morning I thank God for all my blessings, I am so blessed, I just count my blessings. Those are words that don't match the scenario or the scene. That, my friends is a paradox. From a worldly human perspective Bruce

didn't have much of anything to be thankful for but in the light of eternity he could see all the blessings that God was giving him. And his attitude of gratitude changed me forever.

Today we are going to look at a Paradox of Generosity

Go ahead and turn to 2 Corinthians 8 and bookmark it and here is some background information which I am going to give a shoutout to pastor Skip Heitzig who I borrowed a lot of this info from, thanks Skip

Paul is writing a second letter to the church in Corinth, a Greek city of about 90,000 which was a on a strip of land linking two harbors, so a busy city with lots of activity, an influential city, lots of religions represented, lots of diversity, a center for trade, so at least some it's members were what might have been considered wealthy, but the majority were middle class folks. Sounds a lot like Bloomington

So, let's look at **2 Corinthians 8:1-4**. NIV

ON SCREENS

8 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

So, a couple questions come to mind, one Who is Paul taking up a collection for and why?

At the time of this letter, there was a famine in the land and the hardest hit area seemed to be Jerusalem. A famine back in those days meant people were going hungry and the Christians in Jerusalem were in an even more vulnerable position. You see, like our local economy revolves around IU, life in Jerusalem revolved around the temple, it was also the center of the economy and was run by the Sadducees, who did not believe in miracles or the resurrection so certainly didn't allow Christians to have jobs or make money related to the temple, which is Sad You see. Paradoxically, it was the Sadducees who had become a bigger enemy to Christians than the Pharisees, who had been the main enemies of Jesus, coming up with all kinds of false charges against him, which was not Fair you see.

Two more paradoxes or is that parodie? Are found here as well. One that Paul is asking all the church plants to help support Jerusalem, the original sending church and the other that Paul is now pleading passionately for some of the same people that he persecuted previously in his life as Saul. Wasn't it he who was dragging Christians out of their homes and throwing them in prison, wasn't it he who was in charge of Stephen's stoning. Hmm, interesting

But the main paradox is the giving of the churches in Macedonia

These Macedonian churches are Phillipi, Thessalonica and Berea. You see at one time Macedonia in northern Greece was full of natural resources but wars and empires stripped the area of gold, silver, iron ore and left the people without many resources of their own. In a word, they were poor. < Hobo Bag>

Now, I have been poor in my life more than once. When I was in college, I was subletting an apartment and I was so poor I couldn't afford to pay the electric bill to keep the lights on. Those were some of the darkest days of my life. I was so poor I couldn't even pay attention. I was so poor I had to play Dungeons OR Dragons. I had to eat Hamburger Helper without the Hamburger and sometimes without the Helper. And then when Kristi and I started dating, I had just resigned from one

job and over the next 6 months I made a total of \$75 which comes to about a buck 50 per month, that works out to about a nickel a day for those of you at home who are keeping score, so I made sure she didn't marry me for my money.

But that was nothing compared to the poverty of the Macedonian church- Paul calls it extreme poverty

So, in spite of their poverty they gave above and beyond their ability. The ones who could least afford to give, gave the most and THAT my friends is a paradox. .

Please put Verse 2 back on the screen

ON SCREENS

In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.

In the MIDST of A VERY SEVERE TRIAL(of their own, not sure what that is, but it was severe) their OVERFLOWING JOY plus EXTREME POVERTY turned into RICH GENEROSITY. The church in Jerusalem was in need and the Macedonian churches gave sacrificially and were begging to give more. They did not let their circumstances detract from their willingness to give. You might be sitting here this morning feeling like the Macedonians, feeling pretty poor financially or you might be sitting here feeling like the Corinthians, with more than enough. If the Lord is calling us to give generously, he will make a way and it doesn't matter if we have much or little. So, the first thing we can learn is...

We can give generously regardless of our circumstances ON SCREEN

And part of the reason that they were able to do this is that they gave themselves first of all to the Lord. Check out verse 5

Verses 5 ON SCREEN

. ⁵ And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us.

They surrendered their entire lives to the Lord, their hearts, minds, bodies and souls they surrendered. And they also surrendered their finances.

They were not just committed to giving - because commitment retains some level of control on our part. I can be committed to giving and still back out of my commitment due to unforeseen circumstances. If I have surrendered my finances to the Lord, I will do whatever He wants me to do.

If some guy walks up to you on the street, points a gun at you and tells you to put your hands up and hand over your wallet, you don't start telling him about your other financial commitments, you surrender by putting your hands up and hand over your wallet. Well, God is not pointing a gun at you and we are not either. Giving as part of your worship of the Lord is between you and Him, we do it within the context of this local body Sherwood Oaks Christian Church but our generosity impacts not only this church body but other church bodies and ministries around the world, just like Macedonia was supporting and impacting their sister church in Jerusalem. The challenge we are putting out there is to surrender, unconditional surrender of our resources: our time, our talent and our treasure.

Some of you will be ringing the bells for the Salvation Army and it's founder, General William Booth, was once asked to reveal the secret of his success. After some hesitation, tears came to his eyes and he said,

ON SCREEN

"I will tell you the secret. God has had all there was of me. There have been men with greater brains than I have, men with greater opportunities, but from the day that I got the poor of London on my heart and caught a vision of what Jesus could do with them, I made up my mind that God should have all of William Booth." It was this which led Dr. J. Wilbur Chapman, the questioner, to remark, "I learned from William Booth that the greatness of a man's power is the measure of his surrender."

So, if we are wrestling with the concept of Living like God Owns Everything, maybe it's time we pull out the white flag (White Flag) and like the Macedonians **surrender all of ourselves to the Lord including our time our talent and our treasure** **ON SCREEN**

Grace of God is the Key to Generous Giving.

How else were the Macedonians able to do this incredible giving? Through the grace of God. What is this Grace of God that is mentioned 5 times in this chapter. We throw the word grace around pretty often here at church but what exactly is it? Well its amazing for one.

ON SCREEN

Grace: Unmerited or undeserved favor.

When we recognize that we are the recipients of God's undeserved favor, we develop an attitude of gratitude and it is out of this gratefulness, acknowledging God's unmerited favor that allows us to give joyfully regardless of our circumstances and sometimes even more than what we thought was possible.

Acknowledging Gods Grace leads to an attitude of gratitude that overflows in joyful generosity **ON SCREEN**

Not only does Paul lift up the Macedonians as an example, he brings up the ultimate example of giving and self sacrifice;

In Verses 8 & 9 he says

ON SCREEN.

8 I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. 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.

And this is not rich like Richie Rich Rich, this is spiritually rich, becoming children of the King, who calls us to an abundant life full of rich relationships and the priceless hope of an eternity waiting for us in heaven.

Ultimate love is ultimate sacrifice. How does anyone know that you love them if you never sacrifice for them. The Macedonian Christians chose to make sacrifices to help the Christians in Jerusalem. Jesus chose to make the ultimate sacrifice for us. Jesus had all the riches in heaven and yet he

humbled himself, was born into poverty, lived a life with very little materially, but through his perfect life and death on the cross, gave us the most priceless and valuable riches in all of history. Forgiveness, Reconciliation with God, an abundant life now and Eternal Life Forever. We have the choice as to how we are going to sacrifice to help the hungry, hurting and lost in Bloomington, in Indiana and around the world.

For God so loved the world He gave His one and only son

We give because God first gave to us. ON SCREEN

So if God's grace and our gratitude are the beginning of generous giving, follow through is important. (Golf Club) If I swing a golf club but don't follow through, I am not going to accomplish much and certainly won't be making any progress. Follow through is crucial in golf, baseball, just about every sport and it is crucial in the success of every aspect of ministry, especially giving

The Corinthians had started to give but in verses 10 let's see what happened

ON SCREENS

10 And here is my judgment about what is best for you in this matter. Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. 11 Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means.

So when it comes to fulfilling your pledge or giving what you are supposed to be giving Paul is saying GivR done. but since it is better to Give than Git, maybe Paul is saying we need to GivR done. Good intentions are good only if they lead to good actions.

Let's GivR Done ON SCREEN

So to RECAP (ON SCREEN)

- **We can give generously regardless of our circumstances**
- **Let us surrender ALL of ourselves to the Lord including our time, our talent and our treasure**
- **Acknowledging Gods Grace leads to an attitude of gratitude that overflows in joyful generosity**
- **We give because God first gave to us.**
- **Let's GivR Done**

The last thing Jesus said as He was on his way back up to heaven was a command.

ON SCREENS

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:16-20

So, in order to fulfill the Great Commission, we need to like the Macedonians help other churches in their time of need and also help them make disciples of all nations.

This concept of churches helping support other churches is not a foreign concept, as a matter of fact, I am really excited to share some of the ways that Sherwood Oaks partners with other churches and ministries in Bloomington, the US and around the world.

ON SCREENS On the screen behind me is a list of some of the ministries that we partnership with and your giving makes these ministries possible.

And we are thrilled to have some representatives of two of our ministry partners with us here today Simmi and her son Suraj from North India Christian Mission and Sarah & Brooke from IDES, International Disaster Emergency Services. Please join me on stage and we want to hear about an excellent opportunity to put into action some of the ideas about generosity that we have been talking about over the last few weeks.

Sarah & Brooke, please tell us a little bit about IDES, what are your core areas of ministry?

And how long have you been around?

And what are you doing to celebrate 50 years of ministry?

And where would you like to begin?

Simmi & Suraj, please tell us about North India Christian Mission

Please tell us about this area that you have identified as a good place to plant a new church

And what is the estimated cost to get this church built and operating?

And approximately how many people have decided to follow Jesus through God's work at NICM?

So we have a great opportunity to live like God owns everything, to give with the right heart, to make a big impact and to change the lives of hundreds and eventually thousands who will hear the Good News of Jesus Christ in an area that desperately needs hope and deliverance.

So you have a chance to come alongside this church plant by giving to the Gratitude Offering and every dollar that you give will be doubled up to \$25,000.

That is money making money and that money makes ministry and that ministry makes many meet Jesus. Let's make our money make ministry and Let's let the Joy of our generosity please Jesus.