

A Theology of Kingdom Generosity

Pastoral Counsel from the Elders of Greenwood Community Church

When we are captured by grace to live in the way of Jesus, we are increasingly transformed to live joyfully generous lives for God's fame. The truly good life is the generous life!

"The Kingdom that Jesus preached and lived was all about a glorious, uproarious, absurd generosity." N.T. Wright

Adopted by the Session of Greenwood Community Church, Greenwood Village, Colorado on 10/17/2019.

Why this pastoral counsel?

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. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. 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.

1 Timothy 6:17-19

To be clear, we want something for our people (more faith, joy, freedom and purpose) rather than something from our people (more money). We want our people to grow into joyfully generous disciples of Jesus, who wisely manage their time, talent and treasure for the greatest Kingdom impact.

We don't want our people to be seduced and enslaved by the love of money. As Paul says – *"People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with all kinds of grief" (1 Timothy 6:9-10).*

As we strive by God's grace to pastor our people faithfully, we believe we love our people well by helping them to know and obey God's Word on generosity. Obedience to Jesus leads to freedom and joy. Excelling in the grace of giving is a vital way we experience LIFE with Jesus.

But just as you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us – see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

2 Corinthians 8:7

Our counsel to our congregation is motivated by the following realities. First, God is the most joyfully generous Person in the universe. He demonstrated His radical generosity by giving His Son Jesus to be our crucified and risen Lord (John 3:16). Jesus reveals this same generosity by becoming poor so that we might have the treasure of the King and His Kingdom (2 Corinthians 8:9; Matthew 13:44-46). Faithfulness to Jesus is grounded in God's powerful grace that aims to transform us into the likeness of Jesus and God the Father. To live as a disciple of Jesus is to be transformed into a person who is joyfully generous with our time, talent and treasure.

Second, God's Word has much to say about money and possessions. There are 2,350 verses in the Bible about money and possessions. About 15% of Jesus' teaching is on money and possessions including almost half of his parables. Jesus singled out money and possessions as unrivaled in their power to deceive and enslave us (Matthew 6:24). He teaches us that money and possessions are a deeply spiritual issue, and our management of them is something vital to our relationship with God. Therefore, both our love and wisdom are expressed through our commitment to follow Jesus in his instructions in this area. As Philip Yancey said – "Mostly, I
Adopted by the Session of Greenwood Community Church, Greenwood Village, Colorado on 10/17/2019.

wish I did not have to think about money at all. But I have somehow come to terms with the Bible's very strong statements about money."

Third, as Paul says in 1 Timothy above, our generosity is a vital way we experience "life that is truly life" both now and forever. Jesus offers us LIFE with God in His beautiful Kingdom now and forever. Learning from Jesus how to manage the money entrusted to us by God is a vital step for living a life joyfully free of greed and fear of scarcity.

A Basic Theology of Generosity

Theology is thinking right thoughts about God and His ways. All good theology is grounded in the character and ways of God as revealed in Scripture. Here we identify seven Biblical truths that we believe should serve as our theological foundation on generosity.

A. Joyful generosity flows from a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

And we, who with unveiled faces behold the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

2 Corinthians 3:18

The God and Father of Jesus Christ is the most generous person in the universe, and He is the first and most generous giver (John 3:16). Every good and perfect gift flows from His generous heart (James 1:16-18). Jesus proclaimed and modeled a Kingdom of generosity ruled by his generous Father.

God intends to make us joyfully generous like Himself, and we are most like God when we give our time, talent and treasure for His glory (Philippians 2:5-7). Generous givers experience a life full of joy, because God's blessings accompany a generous life (2 Corinthians 8:1-2; 9:6-15). As Jesus said – "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). If we are in a relationship with the most joyfully generous Person, we should begin to express His joyful generosity.

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 might become rich.

2 Corinthians 8:9

B. All that we have is from God to be managed for His glory and Kingdom.

The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.

Psalms 24:1

One of the most basic truths is that our lives are entrusted to us to be lived for God's glory. Our very lives, including our time, talent and treasure, are not so much given to us

Adopted by the Session of Greenwood Community Church, Greenwood Village, Colorado on 10/17/2019.

as entrusted to us for our management (1 Corinthians 4:2). This explains the New Testament warnings that we will all give an accounting to God for how we spend our lives, and we will be appropriately rewarded (Matthew 16:27; Romans 2:6; 14:12; 1 Corinthians 3:8-9; 2 Corinthians 5:9-10; Philippians 4:17). Put simply - God is the owner. I'm His manager. My management has eternal consequences.

Jesus spoke of this reality often. One parable that teaches the basics of stewardship is called the parable of the talents (Matthew 24:14-30). In the parable Jesus is teaching us how to see our lives in view of his return. The master entrusts his property to his servants to be managed for his benefit. Two of the servants faithfully use the entrusted talents while one servant does nothing. Upon the master's return, he requires an accounting from each servant. The two faithful servants are commended while the third servant is judged harshly.

Jesus teaches us that the life of faith is not just receiving gifts, but also giving accounts. In the Gospel, grace always precedes responsibility, but it also presumes responsibility. Jesus teaches us to live in view of eternity, managing God's resources entrusted to us for His glory. God's grace is a powerful force that transforms us from consumers to faithful managers motivated by love and joy. We want to live our lives faithfully managing our time, talent and treasure so we can hear Jesus say to us – *“Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share in your master's happiness!”*

C. Our wise and faithful management of God's gifts depends on our ability to see reality.

But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matthew 6:20 - 21

Jesus motivates us towards Kingdom generosity by addressing our self-interests. If we can really see our lives now in view of eternity, we will see that the wisest return on our investment is to generously invest in the Kingdom of God now rather than spend money on things or experiences that will not endure. According to Jesus, the greatest deterrent to generosity is the belief that the earth is our ultimate home.

In Matthew 6:19-24 Jesus teaches us three key realities that should motivate us to be joyfully generous now towards the Kingdom of God. First, every person is an investor of treasure (v. 19-21). We all value something that we believe will help us experience the best life possible. We will naturally spend our time and energy pursuing what we value

the most. Because our hearts always follow our treasure, this becomes the real organizing principle of our life.

Second, we all live with some vision of reality. According to Jesus, almost everything depends on our ability to see (v. 22-23). If we do not see our life now in view of eternity, we will waste time investing in treasures that will not endure.

Third, as spiritual beings we are all worshippers attributing ultimate worth to something. Every person serves some God even if they are not religious (v. 24). Wealth has a unique power to blind us to reality, compete for our devotion, and enslave us. Like all false gods, wealth demands all kinds of sacrifices. As Tim Keller says – “Every treasure but Jesus will insist you die to purchase it. But Jesus is the one treasure who died to purchase you.”

Money makes a great servant, but a lousy God. Therefore, we need a clear vision of reality from Jesus. If we will learn from Jesus how to see our life now, we will be motivated to invest our resources in the Kingdom of God. This investment strategy makes the most sense for us personally in eternity. As Randy Alcorn says – “You can’t take it with you, but you can send it on ahead.”

D. Jesus warns us against the deceptive nature of greed.

Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.

(Luke 12:15)

Greed refers to the acquisitive attitude of always wanting more beyond what we need. Jesus says our life does not consist in the accumulation of things or experiences. There’s more to life than birth, consumption and death. He could hardly offer a more serious warning for us living in our materialistic, consumer culture where advertising appeals to our sin nature’s unlimited appetite.

Jesus illustrates the deceptive nature of greed with a parable (Luke 12:16-21). A farmer does not acquire his wealth immorally. He has a series of good years that lead him to ask – “*what shall I do?*” His solution is to build bigger barns concluding – “*You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.*” But in the parable, God says to the farmer – “*You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?*”

Upon experiencing God's blessing, the farmer asked the right question. However, he reached the wrong conclusion, because he had a false view of reality. He thought the purpose of his life was to acquire and consume. His perspective was completely temporal and self-oriented. He thought he had a storage problem, but he had a spiritual problem. It never occurred to him that he ultimately owed his life to God or that God had prospered him so that he might share his abundance with others (2 Corinthians 9:11). Jesus concludes his parable with the warning – *"This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."* The only effective antidote to materialism is generosity – to live "rich toward God."

One of the things that makes greed so deceptive is that we can always find someone who has more than we do. Given the deceptive nature of greed, it is easy to miss our own. The reality is that virtually all Americans are "rich" by New Testament standards and certainly when compared to the rest of the world where 43% of the population lives without basic sanitation; 13% are hungry and malnourished; 18% struggle to live on less than \$1 per day; and 53% struggle to live on less than \$2 per day!

*Whoever loves money never has enough money;
whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income.
Ecclesiastes 5:10*

E. Jesus encourages us against the fear of scarcity.

*Therefore, I tell you do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. ... But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.
Matthew 6:25, 33*

Our greatest emotional deterrent may not be greed, but fear. We may wrestle with the fear that if we give too much away, we will not have enough to live on. Every desire to be financially generous may have a corresponding impulse of fear. This is normal, because fear and faith usually go together. Anytime we are responding to the Lord's invitation to grow in our faith, we are likely to battle a corresponding fear.

In His wisdom, the Lord has taken our fear into account. He has set up the economics of His Kingdom to work in our favor when we reject fear for generosity. Jesus addresses this fear directly in his famous sermon (Matthew 6:19-34). After addressing our need to see reality clearly (v. 19-24), Jesus addresses our fear that if we are generous, we will lack what we need (v. 25-34). He introduces us to a promise of God: if we make God's Kingdom our priority, He will provide what we need to live (v. 33). If we believe He really

is in charge of the world's economy, then we can trust Him to take care of us while we are giving to His Kingdom priorities. Faith overcomes fear.

Paul addresses this same promise in 2 Corinthians 8 – 9. After commending the poor Macedonian Christians for their generosity, he exhorts the Corinthian Christians to join them (2 Corinthians 8:1-15). Paul addresses their fear of giving by teaching the spiritual law of the harvest (2 Corinthians 9:6-15). If a farmer wants a crop, he must sow his seed. In the same way, the Lord has set up the economics of the Kingdom to reward those who are financially generous. We may fear we don't have enough money to be generous, but that's like thinking we can't risk sowing seed in a field for a crop.

When we give from a cheerful heart transformed by grace, the Lord will return to us more than we give. This is not, as the prosperity gospel proponents contend, a way to get materially rich. Instead, it's the Lord's way of addressing our fear that if we are generous toward His priorities, we will never lack what we need. His purpose in blessing us is so that we can joyfully partner with Him (2 Cor. 9:10-11).

This most generous God who gives seed to the farmer that becomes bread for your meals is more than extravagant with you. He gives you something you can then give away, which grows into full-formed lives, robust in God, wealthy in every way, so that you can be generous in every way, producing with us great praise to God.

2 Corinthians 9:10-11

Andy Stanley expresses God's solution to our fear:

For many believers, cheerful giving has become fearful giving. We are not opposed to supporting God's kingdom with our resources. And we're not really greedy. But we are concerned. We're concerned that if we don't look after our own needs first, they might not get looked after at all.

Yet the testimony of Scripture, together with the experiences of millions of believers, sends a resounding response to our concerns. Any fear associated with giving to God's kingdom is irrational. It's on par with a farmer who, out of fear of losing his seed, refuses to plant his fields.

The principle of sowing and reaping applies to our finances. Those who sow generously can expect to reap generously and receive a bountiful return.

God's nature is to replenish the stores of those who strive to be faithful conduits for His kingdom work. When you participate with God in His mission, you can trust Him to reward you abundantly for every good deed. When you begin to

view your wealth from God's perspective, you'll see that the thing to fear isn't giving away too much but sowing too little. *Fields of Gold*, p. 4-5, 17.

F. The New Testament standard of giving is joyful and sacrificial generosity.

And now brothers I want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they were able to give as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability.

2 Corinthians 8:1-3

Whenever the topic of giving arises, the most likely question is how much should we give? What is God's expectation or standard? More specifically, is the Old Testament command to tithe (give 10%) still valid? While these are all good questions, they miss the most important point. The most important question is not – how much money do I have to give to Kingdom ministries? Rather, it is who or what is my greatest treasure, and how is that reflected in my giving?

While Jesus certainly implied that he expected us to tithe (Matthew 5:17-20; 23:23-24), there is no specific New Testament Scripture where tithing is explicitly commanded. Paul offers us the clearest instruction in the New Testament when he says – *“Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7).*

The context of Paul's statement reveals that he believed the Christians, in response to God's powerful grace, would give generously and sacrificially. This standard of joyful and sacrificial generosity is taught by Jesus too when he commends the poor widow who gave two coins. He says – *“I tell you the truth, this poor widow put in more than all the others. All of these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty gave all she had to live on” (Luke 21:1-4).*

Obviously, what is generous and even sacrificial varies from person to person. When we consider the New Testament standard, we realize that literally tithing (10%) our money may or may not be particularly generous or sacrificial. We may need to really wrestle with God's Word, including His promises and warnings, to come to a place of joyful generosity. Instead of asking how much of our money will we give away, the better question is how much of God's money will we keep for ourselves and how much give away?

G. Excelling in the grace of giving requires faith, planning and discipline.

*And here is my advice about what is best for you in this matter. Last year you were the first not only to give but to have the desire to do so. Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means.
2 Corinthians 8:10-11*

Paul did an interesting thing when he was collecting money from various churches to help the Jerusalem church in famine (2 Corinthians 8-9). He used the generosity of the poor Macedonian Christians to stir up the generosity of the Corinthian Christians. It seems the Corinthians had earlier promised a collection for Paul to take to Jerusalem, but they had not fulfilled their promise. Given Paul's teaching about sowing and reaping, it seems likely they had become fearful they would not have enough if they gave the money (2 Corinthians 9:6-11).

Paul's response is instructive for us. He calls them to keep their promise - to excel in the grace of giving, and he says that he is testing the sincerity of their love (2 Corinthians 8:1-15). They are to respond to God's grace motivating them to give by keeping their commitment despite their fears. They are to overcome their fear with faith in God's promises, and they are to exercise their faith in concrete action.

Here we see an important principle for growing in generosity. We must take specific steps to be generous despite our fear of the unknown. If we are to ever excel in the grace of giving, faith, planning and discipline will be required of us. We need a specific plan to execute. Otherwise we will give only when it's convenient, from an emotional appeal or only from our financial leftovers.

Practical Application – The Four P's

The following are four Biblical principles of financial stewardship that faithfully generous Christians have followed to make a specific plan to excel in the grace of giving:

1. Priority giving = of all the items in your monthly budget, the Lord's share comes first. We give to Him before we pay bills, save or spend money on ourselves (1 Corinthians 16:2; Proverbs 3:9-10).
2. Percentage giving = you decide on a percentage of your income you will give regularly regardless of your emotions or circumstances (1 Corinthians 16:2;

Deuteronomy 16:10, 16-17). Most people have considered the tithe (10%) the starting blocks. How much can you give cheerfully and not reluctantly (2 Cor. 9:7)?

3. Progressive giving = can you decide you want to grow in generosity and increase your giving over time? Perhaps you can slowly increase the percentage you give. Perhaps you determine to live at a set standard of living and give everything over that amount. What is a percentage that would be sacrificial for you?
4. Prompted giving = you are sensitive to the Lord's promptings to give to special occasions (1 John 3:17). This is over and above your regular giving.

Lastly how should you apportion your Kingdom giving? How much should you give to your local church and how much to other Kingdom ministries? There is no specific Scripture that answers this question, but we do know that the New Testament writers expected the people would support their local church as well as take special collections for ministry needs (1 Corinthians 7:1-14). The support for the local church is the New Testament application of the Old Testament principle that tithes were to support the Temple ministry (1 Corinthians 9:1-12; Malachi 3:6-13; 1 Peter 2:4-5).

Of course, we have endless giving options today. It seems wise to us, despite our obvious self-interest as elders of Greenwood, that our priority giving should support the local church before we give to other ministries. The local church is still God's primary strategy for extending His Kingdom, and it is the primary community in which we are seeking to live as Jesus' disciples. After we give to our local church, we can generously give to other Kingdom ministries as well as be open to the spontaneous leading of the Holy Spirit.

"God has given us two hands – one to receive with and the other to give with. We are not cisterns for hoarding; we are channels made for sharing. If we fail to fulfill this divine duty and privilege, we have missed the meaning of Christianity."

Billy Graham

"He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." Jim Elliot

Recommended Resources

1. The Treasure Principle by Randy Alcorn
2. Giving is the Good Life by Randy Alcorn
3. Fields of Gold by Andy Stanley

Adopted by the Session of Greenwood Community Church, Greenwood Village, Colorado on 10/17/2019.