

## ***Extravagant Generosity***

*EKG: Ministry Flows from the Heart*

### **1 Timothy 6:17-19**

John Breon

Today we begin a journey toward extravagant generosity. Often, before we begin a trip, we get our vehicle checked out to make sure it's running well. Before we start an exercise program, we might need to have a check-up to evaluate our health and ability to do the program. We want to start our journey toward extravagant generosity with a check-up. Find your heartbeat. Does everyone have a pulse? Now, if we checked our spiritual pulse, what would we find? During the next few weeks, we'll find some ways to check our spiritual health. The cards that name what you love about our church are one way to check our church's spiritual health.

Now let's look at how the apostle Paul begins to address spiritual health. When Paul tells Timothy to command the rich, we might think, "That's for someone else, not me. I'm not rich." And, compared with some people we may not seem rich. But, compared with people in every part of our county and country and around the world, if we have shelter, clothes, and food, we're rich. And most of us have resources well beyond our basic necessities for survival, so this word is for us.

Earlier, Paul condemned greed so strongly that now he doesn't want the Christians who are rich to feel condemned by what he said. But he does want them to have a specifically Christian perspective on money.

In verses 17-19 Paul uses four different forms of the word "rich." *The rich* are not to trust in *riches*, but in God who *richly* gives all things, and they are then *to be rich in good deeds*, generous and willing to share. Eugene Peterson translates that, "to be extravagantly generous." And this is how to store up treasure for the future.

Those who are rich are told, "Don't be haughty, or arrogant." This is a warning not to imagine that our wealth, our possessions, our lives are ours because of our own efforts and ingenuity. All things are from God. It's easy if we have a lot of money to think that *all* our needs are met, to be self-

sufficient. That leads to being “high-minded”—thinking more highly of ourselves than we should.

Paul wants Timothy to go on to tell the rich, “Don’t put your hope in wealth, which is so uncertain.” We ought not trust only in ourselves and we ought not trust in riches/wealth. Because it is uncertain. Wealth is not lasting. It can be stolen or lost or badly invested and, as Paul said earlier, you can’t take it with you when you die (verse 7). Have you ever seen a hearse pulling a U-Haul?

Instead of hoping in uncertain riches, fix your hope on God. Throughout this letter Paul expresses salvation as hope in God. That speaks of the life of the coming age as well as trust and endurance.

Now, not trusting in wealth, not putting confidence in it, does not mean totally rejecting it. God richly and generously gives us all things to enjoy. All of life, all that we are and have is a gift—God’s gracious and generous gift to us. What do you do with a gift like that?

Sometimes we misuse God’s good gifts by simply indulging ourselves or hoarding the good things God gives. But when we realize that everything, including wealth, is God’s gracious gift, then we can enjoy it.

And enjoying everything as God’s generous gift leads us away from high-mindedness or conceit. It sets us free from false security, and sets us free to give generously. Those who are rich are to use their wealth to benefit others. Do good. Be rich in good works. Be generous. Be willing to share with others. We give gladly, gratefully, and generously. That kind of giving isn’t hesitant and grudging. It flows from the heart. And when we give that way we realize that true “riches” are found in the giving, not in the having.

Doing all these things means storing up a treasure of true riches for the future. This doesn’t mean that we “buy off” God or earn salvation. It simply means that true wealth has nothing to do with earthly possessions, which are uncertain and belong only to this present age. We find “true riches” by generously sharing the riches of this life. To give away riches is not to suffer loss but to store up riches of another kind—a solid foundation for the future. This treasure, true wealth, is the life that really is life—the abundant and eternal life God gives us in Jesus Christ.

There's an old saying that used to be on cross-stitch samplers in people's homes:

Only one life 'twill soon be past  
Only what's done for Christ will last.

The things that really last are those done in Christ's name for God's glory. The life that is truly life is eternal—the imitations are passing. The life we have in Christ is more real than anything apart from him.

None of this means that we should be poor managers of our money, or that we shouldn't take care of our families, or that we should all go live in caves or something. I like the image of "seeds with wings" we read this week (*Practicing Extravagant Generosity* 17-19). Trees drop their seeds nearby where they can shelter and nurture the seedlings. We are giving from the heart when we care for those close to us whom God has entrusted to us. Some seeds also scatter and travel away from the parent tree. We give to bless others beyond our immediate family and local church. Either way, reproduction and fruitfulness result.

What Paul says in this passage reminds us that we are stewards. We are entrusted with something by someone else. God's gift of life and all things carries great responsibility. God expects us to use these gifts wisely, to share them generously, knowing that they are ours only for a time and that God will hold us accountable in eternity for what we do with this life.

Out of gladness and gratitude we give. We give to feed the hungry and clothe the unclothed and shelter the homeless. We give to educate and uplift people. We give to advance the cause of God's kingdom. And so we give to the church to enhance and extend ministry.

I heard a story about a man named John Caruso, whose six-year-old daughter, Ruby, was in the hospital with leukemia. The family was praying and asking for healing. John was a contractor and he bought and refurbished a house near the hospital. It was the first Ronald McDonald House in that city—a place for families of hospitalized children to stay. Over the years, John saved and gave \$700,000 for leukemia research and treatment. If you asked him why, he would point to Ruby, now an adult with

a child of her own (Jim Buskirk). That's extravagant generosity as an expression of gratitude.

How do we show gratitude through a generous and caring spirit? You can see just a few examples on the bulletin insert. Take a look at the "Heart Cards" that people have filled out telling things you love about the church.

I hope you're reading the daily devotional *Practicing Extravagant Generosity* by Robert Schnase. Many of you heard Bishop Schnase back in February at our Cunningham Lectures. In the reading for Tuesday of Week One, Bishop Schnase recalls one spring when he saw various birds preparing to build their nests. He says we sometimes use the idea of building nests as a way of describing people successfully providing for their own comforts. If someone achieves a career position of some ease and security, friends say, "You've built quite a nest for yourself here!" The word *nest* can refer to shelter, coziness, somewhere homelike and comfortable.

Then he comments:

In actual fact, the nests which birds build are not for the birds who build them, but for their young, for the next generation, for the future of the species. The hours of carrying straw, sticks, and mud; the days of defensive watchfulness; and the weeks of endless feeding are all for the benefit of the new ones, the young, the future.

Now consider "nests" we build in our churches. The buildings, programs, ministries, job descriptions, and services we build—are they for our own comfort and coziness? Or are they to further the faith and provide for future generations? Does our giving serve us and our needs or serve God by serving the mission of the church to reach new people? Vibrant, fruitful congregations focus as much energy, prayer, and planning on those who are outside the congregation as they do on those who are already active in the congregation. (14-15)

There is a lot to love about our church. Let's celebrate those things more. I invite you to join this time of celebration over the next few weeks. One thing you can do is use the devotional guide. Also, bring another card

next week identifying a person in the church who has made a contribution to your spiritual growth. Come next week ready to share and celebrate.