

## The Joy of Generosity

### Week 1: The Heart

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There's this core memory I have from my childhood. We're driving home from church one Sunday and I can hear my mom quietly ask my dad if tithes from that morning were enough to provide a paycheck for that week. I can picture the street we were on. The car we were in. The texture of the seats.

The glare of the sun. The lack of shirt I was wearing was because I'd worked up a sweat playing basketball in the gym of the school we were meeting in, because every pastor's kid knows... I'd had plenty of time to shoot hoops as I was waiting for them to finish talking with all the people after service... and I don't think our AC was working in the car at that time. I remember all the details...Except one...The answer to her question.

I don't know if it was one of those weeks when they got paid or didn't. Honestly, looking back on it. I think that's part of the beauty of that core memory. Because it didn't matter. *Whether the tithes were enough to pay the church staff on any particular week didn't have an impact on how I experienced childhood.* Because mom and dad were gonna show up that coming week and generously give of themselves no matter what.

***And maybe even more importantly*** they were going to be generous in their treatment of me and my siblings at home... regardless of what money had come in... or didn't come in. They were going to walk out their calling of being *generous in spirit*.

That HEART OF GENEROSITY isn't a natural thing. It's SUPERNatural. You know how we get when things get hard, right? We often get irritable. It would have been easy for my parents to be short with me in those moments. But that wasn't my childhood experience. I got to receive what I believe to be a generational blessing. To be raised in a home where a HEART OF GENEROSITY set the tone of our family atmosphere.

*That's hard to do, isn't it?* When stressors come; to not allow those things that are bringing us fear and producing pain points. To control our demeanor and posture and temperament to those around us. That's something I am super grateful about this church. And specifically its leadership. The leadership here has made it a priority to say that if Jesus doesn't have anything to say about the hard things and places of this world... the things that produce pain points, well then He doesn't have anything to say at all. But He does have something to say.

Shawn, I want to thank you in particular for pressing into hard places. For leading us into God's Word to guide us through the pain points in our lives. Sexuality. Politics. Mental health. Finances. You follow our Jesus into those places and invite us to join you in declaring that He's already there and He's already overcome and that we can walk in Victory alongside Him in anything this world can throw at us.

I saw a poll recently that over half of Americans feel like their financial situation is worsening. I'd say that's a pain point.... People are concerned. I won't ask for a show of hands... %%% of financial stress, 10% confident, 60% crunched, 26% slipping, 4% drowning

There's a story in Mark chapter 12 that gives a small glimpse into someone who knew all too well the hardships that this world can bring. We really don't know much about her. We don't even know her name. What we do know is that life had dealt some tough blows. So much so, that history has recorded her identity in two words that no one aspires for. Poor. Widow.

Here's Mark 12... starting in verse 41 (CSB)

*41 Sitting across from the temple treasury, he watched how the crowd dropped money into the treasury. Many rich people were putting in large sums. 42 Then a poor widow came and dropped in two tiny coins worth very little. 43 Summoning his disciples, he said to them, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. 44 For they all gave out of their surplus, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had — all she had to live on."*

I'm imagining this scene in my mind... will you play it out with me??? I'm picturing some fancy metal buckets... no that's not a fancy enough term... **receptacles**, placed prominently for everyone to see... Rich/wealthy/affluent- oh goodness, this is so heavy... dump loudly in the receptacle... lots of noise. It's impressive! You see... We like our affirmations. And that's not entirely a bad thing, but when it becomes what we pursue, what we worship, what we're motivated by, when we create scenarios to make sure that we receive them.

Oh wow, look at him... he's got this. Look at her... she's done that... and we get that shot of dopamine for accolades.... Then it's our idol. And our beautiful, wonderful, JEALOUS God says nah that ain't it.... So this widow.... Who has experienced substantial pain points. Has experienced LOSS. She has known what it's like to live with HARSHIPS...

She walks in and sees the financially stable, in their world of security... some even in their world of abundance. And they pour in their large deposits... and they clank and clammer and draw the admiration of their peers, and those sounds resound through the sanctuary of the day. And she drops in a couple little coins. Probably her only chance at having lunch that day...

*The large gifts of the rich may have **echoed** off the walls of the temple that day but as she put her two coins in the bucket that day, she unknowingly created an **echo** for all of us who for thousands of years will hear of this seemingly small act and be inspired to also trust our God with our giving... **How Cool is that?!!!***

*Who do you want to be in this story?* If we're given the choice... It's obvious, right? On any normal day: A) Wealthy & Admired, B) Poor & Widowed. No brainer.

Until Jesus flips the day on its head and now when we look through a Kingdom lens. We actually want to be more like the poor widow in this story. The difference is in the heart behind the

action. So how do we get there? How do we get that kind of heart? How do we become one of *those people* who bear the sweet fragrance of our King because of their generosity?

Generosity is about more than just giving of your money; it's rooted in a generous spirit in us. That's what leads to a generous lifestyle. Generosity is an outgrowth of trusting God. So... the first step in becoming generous is to learn to trust God.

I love how our friend Ron Blue encourages us to live like GOD OWNS IT ALL. To have that kind of AWARENESS and CONFIDENCE. I believe it highlights the direct link between generosity and our spiritual lives. When Jesus was talking about money He said *"Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be."* -Matthew 6:21 (NLT)

If **our heart** is in a place of trusting God, we can be free to live out a life of generosity.

Proverbs 3:5-6

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding; in all your ways know him, and he will make your paths straight.*

A word study into the original Hebrew language gives us an insightful image... The word for Trust here means to *lay helplessly face down*. To acknowledge how totally incapable we are, before the God of all capacity. (Understanding my total dependence on the Lord). Think... a newborn baby... totally dependent on another for survival. That kind of trust.

**Or** we can.... Lean on your own understanding. The contrast here is this: Trusting in God vs. Leaning on my own understanding. One will produce the fruit of Generosity ...the other Selfishness. *Developing a heart of generosity comes the more I learn to depend on God.*

Think back on decisions you've made over the past week. Any decisions, but *especially financial*... and then relisten to verse 6... *"Seek His will in all you do and He will show you what path to take"* Are our actions saying... "Lord, will you please show me which way to go here?" Or are they saying "I don't really need to talk to you about this God. I've got it handled." Are we/are you pausing to pray... Father, we acknowledge your Power, your Presence, and we want to surrender to *Your Plan*. Show us **your** way.

I want to PAUSE right here for a moment. *What comes to mind when you hear the word generosity?* What comes to mind when you hear that church is going to spend a month talking through generosity? What fills your heart when you hear that word? PAUSE. Honest w/yourself. PAUSE. Does the thought of giving make you feel stressed? Joy? Guilt? Cynical? Excitement? Where does generosity feel hard for you right now?

Does it make you feel like you're really just being set up by someone who wants to get something out of you? My calling has me spending a lot of my days inviting people into giving to Kingdom work. I never would have guessed fund development was going to be part of my journey. But as they say... here we are. A solid, biblical understanding of fund development in Kingdom work frees you up to know you're really just inviting people to their next "Yes!" to

Jesus. You're simply there to help them understand what some of those options might be. Truly... if you're doing it right- you know God's got whatever needs you have and He's going to provide...

But every fund developer has this voice they wrestle with... (JEFF?) "Well, they're going to think what I really want here is their money." The apostle Paul actually addresses this directly in Philippians 4:17: 'I don't say this because I want a gift from you. Rather, I want you to receive a reward for your kindness.' There's excitement... and freedom when we have a full understanding of Kingdom generosity... And then that posture of Kingdom generosity informs so many aspects of our daily lives and decision making...

How am I going to give my time and spend my days? How am I going to give my energy? How am I going to give my skill sets? But today I want to challenge us to ask the question... and really want to focus in on how do we give of our money? Where your treasure is, there will your heart be... if Jesus is going to say that about our finances...I want to take note -and align my actions accordingly.

Show me your checkbook and you'll show me your priorities/heart. (Who else in your life has access to that space? Who can encourage, challenge, provide accountability?... many of us don't talk about this, do we? Some of us who are married... not even with our spouses)... yet... %%% of people in America live with financial stress

If it's that big of a deal in our lives, doesn't it make sense that Jesus would have some things to say about it? He wants to bring a new level of freedom, health, purpose... So today... sit in this question...**What noise will you make with your generosity... What Echos will reverberate throughout the Kingdom of God as a result of your choosing a HEART OF GENEROSITY?**

I have a friend named Cassie who is often inspiring me to bigger things, and she will ask "IF THE PRAYERS YOU PRAYED TODAY WERE ANSWERED, WOULD THEY CHANGE THE WORLD? OR JUST YOUR WORLD?"

So what now...In this month marked by Thanks and Giving... how do I grow my heart for generosity? If generosity is an area you'd like to grow in... maybe try this... Ron Blue (give plug-positive experience for me) What he does in airports...

This week... put a bill in your pocket 1/5/20/100 whatever... and then pray for the Holy Spirit to show you where to give. You might just be amazed at how that seemingly small act of obedience and generosity could echo through the Kingdom....

IF TIME>>>>Share story of "He calms the storm to a whisper" and the Dollar club????

*I like this church...Because we don't often talk openly with each other about our finances...there can be a sense of shame or guilt or at the very least awkwardness in sharing something like that personal story... but it's really important to celebrate what God is doing here... you see... God is*

*still moving... just like in the early Church who displayed radical generosity in the way they shared their lives and resources with one another. They gave to anyone who had need and would pool their resources together to support struggling Churches. Their generosity was radical, but not surprising.*

*They were just practicing what they saw Jesus do. They were motivated to give by Jesus, who taught them how to be generous through his teaching and example, and he makes it clear that the amount we give is not nearly as important as the heart with which it was given. What is He inviting you into???*

Possible response time invitation:

- ☐ Pray with someone
- ☐ Give financially
- ☐ Surrender your life to the One who makes all things new, and maybe you're here today and you're like "You know what? This Jesus really does have something to say about all of the pain points in my life? And He really does enter into those places with the capacity to transform me through them.... I'm ready to surrender to that kind of King... well the baptism pool is open for you!"