

**The Joy of Generosity**  
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(1 Timothy 6:17-19 NRSV) As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. {18} They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, {19} thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.

I have told you before, that I often do funerals for families that are not connected with Ridge Church. I believe that the message of Jesus calls me as a disciple to extend his love in this way. As a result. I preside over about 10 such funerals each year.

When I meet with a family, particularly a family that I don't know, I ask them about their loved one. "Tell me about them?" I say.

And they begin to tell me all the wonderful things about their loved one → so that I can share those stories and characteristics in my funeral message.

Someday, someone is going to sit down with you (or your loved ones) and ask the same question. How do you want them to answer?

Think about you for a second.  
How would you define yourself?  
Generous or Stingy  
A sharer or a hoarder

Someone said to me the other day – "I am not stingy, I am just tight!"

I hope that you have heard over these last three weeks, that neither Nathan nor I are suggesting that you are poor managers of your money, or that you should give it all to charity.

What we have been trying to say, is that you need a healthy balance in your life, and if your life is consumed with debt, you are missing out on the opportunity to be generous.

I am convinced that we are innately generous persons.  
That we are born that way.  
But then something begins to take over.  
Other voices begin to compete with that inner generous voice, trying to convince us

that we need us to get, or keep the stuff around us.

Fear is certainly one of those BIG voices.  
 Fear tells us that there is not enough  
 Fear has a scarcity mentality

We all know people who operate under a sense of fear –  
 the what if's dominate their thought process.

And when we fear – we tell ourselves that we can't be generous because – well – who knows!

A second voice that calls out to us is the voice of our selfish desire.  
 We convince ourselves that we NEED certain things to make us happy – and if we are generous, then we might not have enough to scratch that itch.

How do we defeat these voices?  
 We acknowledge them and turn the light on them  
 We learn to understand what they are:  
 False Fears and False desires

But the bigger question that we need to wrestle with is WHY DO WE GIVE?

The first reason, I believe is what I just told you:  
 WE WERE CREATED TO BE GENEROUS PEOPLE  
 Inside me is a generous person screaming to get out.

But I also want to share with you some theological reasons why we give

As we grow on our journey – we begin to recognize that we are not at the center of the universe "It's not all about me!"  
 That is a hard lesson for us, but when that begins to sink in, we begin to look at others differently.

Let me try to explain by sharing a quick story

Last year when the floods hit, when I began calling all of the local churches to get organized – I did not do it to be a hero. I didn't do it to become the president or chairperson or whatever title you want to give me of LARRI. I did it because a voice in my head said "If you don't do something, Who will?"

A year later and hundreds of donated hours later → I stick with it because it is what God wants me to do. I believe that.

I am not the best person for the job  
 I am not the most compassionate person for the job  
 But I fit the most important requirement → I said YES

By saying Yes, I affirmed my Christian Journey

A second theological reason is very biblical

Psalm 24 says "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it"  
 Everything we have is a gift from God.  
 LIFE is a gift from God

And when I recognize that it is not mine, but that I am just a steward (a caretaker) of it --- it frees me up to become more generous.

Even though it is not ours, God lets us use it to make our lives, and the lives of those around us better.

In the Hebrew Bible, the expectation of the Jewish community was that you returned a tithe to God – a tithe of your first fruits – in modern terms that equates to 10% of one's income.

God didn't say – I want to deprive you of what you need – give me everything – no God says, share with me a portion of the blessings that you receive.  
 Jesus puts it this way: that we should give sacrificially.

I am amazed by people who hoard things all their lives

Now I believe that there is a psychological component to this  
 The reason I say that is because I cannot throw out books  
 I just can't do it  
 But I have found that I can control my buying of books!

Hoarding is not saving money for retirement or creating an emergency fund → things that we should all be striving to do.

Hoarding is often done out of FEAR – fear that there will not be enough

I love the story of the rich miser who when he died had requested that his wealth be buried with him. He wanted to make sure that he had plenty of wealth wherever he was going.

As the Funeral director was getting ready to close the casket the man's lawyer walked up and placed a large envelope in the casket to be buried with the man.

The funeral director asked the lawyer what he was doing, and he told him that he was

following his client's wishes and burying him with his wealth.

The funeral director was intrigued and asked him what was in the envelope. "A Check" the lawyer replied.

The reality is, you came into the world naked, and thus you shall leave.

But I want to shift gears for a minute

Too often when we begin talking about giving in the church we begin to try and guilt generosity of each other, or we talk about the rewards that we will get by God or in heaven.

We love to quote (and I have been known to) Malachi

Return to me so I can return to you," says God-of-the-Angel-Armies.

"You ask, 'But how do we return?'

"Begin by being honest. Do honest people rob God? But you rob me day after day.

"You ask, 'How have we robbed you?'

"The tithe and the offering—that's how! And now you're under a curse —the whole lot of you—because you're robbing me. **Bring your full tithe to the Temple treasury so there will be ample provisions in my Temple. Test me in this and see if I don't open up heaven itself to you and pour out blessings beyond your wildest dreams.** For my part, I will defend you against marauders, protect your wheat fields and vegetable gardens against plunderers." The Message of God-of-the-Angel-Armies.

"You'll be voted 'Happiest Nation.' You'll experience what it's like to be a country of grace." God-of-the-Angel-Armies says so.

That is a great passage, that challenges us to tithe, but we have often used it to say → see if you give, God will give to you even more.

I have heard pastors say "You will receive 10 fold what you give." Which if you are tithing is an accurate statement, but they make it sound like you will receive 10 fold MORE than what you currently are receiving.

We don't give to earn our way into heaven

<<VIDEO CLIP>>

We don't give because it is going to make God happy.  
God is not dependant on your gifts.

We give because it makes our lives better.

Generosity changes us.

Do any of you remember the sermon I preached last year on generosity.

One of the things I challenged you to do was to keep a generosity diary.

A few of you, I know of did it, because you told me about it, and you said that it made your lives happier.

Every time I went to see Amy Yingling following that sermon, she would tell me about her attitude of gratitude.

We all know people who are full of generosity.

I can think of a number of people in this community, who thoroughly enjoy sharing their blessings.

One of those people who are amazing is our building manager, Dave Miller. He always goes out of his way to help people

One day, I went up to Dave, because he – out of his pocket – paid some youth who had helped him with a task at the church → as I tried to chastise him, Dave gave it right back to me when he said:

“Don’t tell me who I can be generous too.”

Shame on me, for trying to stifle his generosity.

Being generous makes our hearts soar, and fills our lives with joy.

I want you to be able to experience that kind of blessing → that kind of joy.

But you can’t – if you don’t manage what you have well.

Peter Marshall, when he was chaplain of the United States Senate tells a great story about a man who struggled to tithe even though he had a large income. The man said to Marshall,

“I have a problem, I used to tithe regularly some years ago, but . . . but now . . . I am earning \$500,000 a year, and there is just no way I can afford to give about \$50,000.”

Peter Marshall’s response was priceless – He simply said:

“I can certainly see your problem. Let’s pray about it.”

The man agreed so Marshall began to pray:

“Heavenly Father, I pray that you would reduce this man’s salary back to the

pace that he can afford to tithe.”

The truth is, regardless of how much money we make – from our jobs or from our pensions – we have to struggle with the question → How much is enough?

I pray, that you will experience the joy of generosity – as you learn to live life more simply and find the balance that God wants for you and your life.