

Overflow
Part 1: Overflowing
May 9 & 10

I'm incredibly excited about the next four weeks because we are going to be looking at our dream to become a community that Gives Freely of our lives for the good of our neighbors and for God's glory!

So...for the next four weeks, we'll be looking at what the Bible has to say about money and generosity! At the same time, we are going to practice generosity together!

Generosity Weekend: Every year, we set aside a weekend for something we call Generosity Weekend, and we give away the entire offering to our local and global partners who are doing great ministry in our backyard and around the world! **So on May 30th and 31st every dime that comes in will go out!**

This year, we're also going to spend the weekend serving alongside many of our local partners.

So...we'll be at Living Waters in Downtown Lowell helping them care for their guests. We'll be at My Father's House here in Chelmsford doing some facility improvements, which will enable them to continue serving young mothers and their children. We'll be partnering with great organizations like the Wish Project and Mill City grows and the MV Food Bank!

Now...here's the beautiful thing about Generosity Weekend. Not only do we get to champion the work of ministries and organizations that are doing incredible work. These experiences have a way of opening our hearts so that God can do incredible work in and through us!

Did you know that the early church changed the ancient world, in large part, because they gave away their resources in radical and astounding ways!

In fact, this entire series was inspired by the story of some local churches located in ancient Macedonia during the 1st century. We don't know a lot about the early Christians...we know nothing about their vision statements or social media presence or whether they had traditional or contemporary worship gatherings. What we do know, from the accounts recorded for us in Scripture, is that they were outlandishly generous!

The Apostle Paul records their story in 2nd Corinthians chapter 8. Look at verse 1...

"Now I want you to know, dear brothers and sisters, what God in his kindness has done through the churches in Macedonia. They are being tested by many troubles, and they are very poor. But they are also filled with abundant joy, which has overflowed in rich generosity! 2 Corinthians 8:1-2

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Don't you love that? They were economically impoverished, yet their hearts were full of joy! They had no Verizon Fios or Facebook. No 401k retirement plans! Yet according to God's economy, they were rich!

I find it fascinating that when God chose to preserve for future generations a model of Jesus-honoring, world-changing generosity, he chose a community of Christians who barely had a dollar to their name!
And they changed the world...

Imagine what could happen if we learned from their example! If we were so filled with the extravagant love of Jesus Christ that we literally overflowed in generosity toward our neighbors, toward the poor, and toward the mission of our local church?

I believe we could change the world...

For that to happen, we must begin by listening to the heart of God when it comes to our money and financial habits! As we do, it might get uncomfortable from time to time, and we might feel like God is pressing on places where there's tension or pain. Some of us would rather walk out than let God into our finances. **But please hear me!**

God is not after your money. He's after your joy! It's a laughable notion that the Creator of the Universe is somehow dependant on your paycheck to build his kingdom. He's not! He's after your heart! When He has your heart, your life will be filled with true joy instead of a circumstantial happiness that fluctuates with your job security or paycheck or what mortgage interest-rate you qualify for, or how strong the stock market closed this week. When God has your heart, you will be able to enjoy, manage, and share your money for His glory, regardless of your circumstances!

So...let's go to Luke chapter 12, where Jesus tells a story about our money and our hearts. He prefaces the story with this statement...

"Then Jesus said, 'Beware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own.'" 12:15

The first thing Jesus tells us is to guard against greed. Greed is the idea that if I can get more and more and more, I'll be happy and fulfilled! Now...studies don't really back that up!

Your Money or Your Life: Years ago, a book was written called *Your Money or Your*

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Life. The authors asked questions to several hundred people regarding whether they were happy or miserable. **Miserable was a one on a scale of one to five. Joyous was a five. Three was can't complain.** What they found was that the average American answered that they were a **2.6 to 2.8** financially speaking! So...as the most economically prosperous nation in the world, we are "sort of miserable" and almost to a "can't complain." If we only had another iPhone!

Do you know what was interesting? When they compared the respondent's answers to their income, it made no difference how much they made. ***Their level of income did not impact the level of their happiness!***

In fact, when they asked everyone what it would take financially to move emotionally from a 2.5 to 2.8? Do you know what people said on a whole? **"A little more."**

Studies performed by the Gallup Poll show that the average person believes that to be rich, they need to make twice the amount they're currently making! So...if you're making \$10/hour at Dunkin...and then you get promoted to a management position at \$20/hour...you hit the jackpot! But get this. For the person making \$100,000 a year...rich looks like \$200,000 a year.

Money Magazine asked its readers how much money it would take to make them feel rich! Do you know what they said? The readers of ***Money*** responded that a person would need \$5 million in liquid assets to be considered rich! Ok...I went into Boston with Beth on Thursday evening and paid cash for a meal in the North End and felt like the wealthiest man alive...but apparently not!

Boil all of that down...and here's what we find! Most of us believe that in order to be happy (satisfied), all we need is ***"just a little bit more."*** (*need to insert...just a little more clothes...just a little nicer TV...just a little better job with a little more income...just a little more in retirement...just a little newer car...just a little bigger house...just a little more frequent vacations...examples throughout the message!*)

Jesus said to guard against that kind of mentality...

And here's why...listen again to his words...

Life is not measured by how much you own." 12:15b

Jesus is literally saying, *"Your net-worth does not define your self-worth!"*

When we believe that just a little more will make us happy! That more will keep us from worrying or stressing about the future...or give us the security we're looking for! We're basing our self-worth on our net-worth!

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We're basing the quality of our life on the quantity of our assets. Jesus says to us...be careful!

2008 Recession – During the Great Recession of 2008, many people took a big hit financially. Some lost thousands...others millions. Among those who lost everything, some experienced a deep depression and despair. Why? They not only lost their money...they lost their sense of self! When their net-worth plummeted, their sense of meaning fell apart!

Now...most of us probably didn't lose everything when the stock market crashed. We might have lost some sleep, but we still woke up in a bed and to a warm breakfast. It's easy to look at people who took a financial blow and say, *"If I lost my money, I would never despair like that!"*

Maybe that's true. Maybe not! You never really know until it happens. But, regardless of whether you have experienced a complete financial collapse, or you experience financial stress in more subtle ways, I'll suggest that the majority of our money-related problems...from worry to conflict about money; impulsive spending to debt...jealousy or stinginess...all of those things come down to one thing! We build our self-worth on our net-worth. **In Jesus' words, we measure life by what we own!**

How do we know if Jesus' warning applies to us? Look at verse 16. Jesus tells a story to help us see the truth about our heart.

*"Then he told them a story: A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops. He said to himself, What should I do? I don't have room for all my crops. Then he said, I know! I'll tear down **my** barns and build bigger ones. Then I'll have enough room to store all **my** wheat and other goods. And I'll sit back and say to **myself**, **My** friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!" Luke 12:16-19*

At the center of Jesus' story is a rich man with an abundant farm whose crop explodes and all of a sudden he has more money than he knows what to do with. If you read the story carefully, you'll see that the problem isn't the farmer's wealth. The Bible is full of wealthy people who honored God (Abraham, Solomon, Job), and the Bible esteems the person who prepares for the future.

The farmer's problem is his attitude toward wealth! Listen to his words. *What should I do with all **MY** crops? I'll tear down **MY** barns and build bigger ones to store **MY** wheat!* He never once stopped to ask, *"How did I ever get so much? How thankful am I to have my basic needs met? Imagine the good I can do with what I've been given?"*

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He never says that...instead, he goes, *"I need more storage for MY stuff."*

How do you know if you measure life by what you own? Let me give you two questions to ask...

#1 – Ask, "How do I see my extra?"

Now...let's break this question down for a moment! **We can't simply ask, "How do I see my extra."** We must first ask, **"Do I see that I have extra?"** Remember...the thing about the influence of money is that very few of us will say, *"I have extra"* because greed says, *"I need a little more."*

So...we have to zoom out and look at our lives compared to the rest of the world. On a global scale, there is a massive disparity between those who have and those who don't.

If I offered you a job with a salary of \$37,000 a year, would you feel rich? Some of our college students are like, "Yes Sir...that would get me off of Ramen Noodles." But most of you wouldn't even be interested. For most Americans, a salary of \$37,000 would represent a pay cut...

But...if you earn \$37,000 a year, you are in the top 4 percent of wage earners in the world! You are in the 4 percent club... If you're in the 4 percent club...all of your money problems are extra-problems, problems that most of the people on our planet would love to have. **For example...**

Do you ever grumble about bad cell-phone coverage? Is your iPhone software slowing down your 5s... You have an extra-problem...

Trying to figure out where to eat later today? That's an extra-problem!

Trying to break your Dunkin habit? That's merely a problem! Try Starbucks...

Do you have car trouble? Most people around the world walk to their destination.

When the town restricts how many days you can water your lawn this summer, keep in mind that many people, mostly women, woke up this morning and walked several miles with a jug on their head so they could cook and wash. I grumble when my grass browns; then I turn on the sprinkler.

My point is this... The biggest challenge facing rich people is that we've lost our ability to recognize that we're rich...that we have extra!

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So...can we admit for a moment that we do have extra? That anything beyond our shelter, clothing, food, and perhaps basic transportation is extra! Everything else is a nice-to-have...but not a necessity.

Once we admit that we have extra, then we can ask, *"How do I see the extra?"* How we answer that question reveals something about our heart!

The farmer looked at his extra crops and said, *"I need more storage so that nobody gets their hands on my stuff!"*

Look at God's response in verse 20...

"God said to him, You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get everything you worked for? Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God." Luke 12:20-21

The farmer is a fool because he doesn't understand why he has so much extra. He believed the extra was merely a result of his skillful planning and hard work. As a result...he believed the extra was only for current or future consumption!

If you have extra (whether it's for a coffee habit, or trust funds to help you figure out to do with all the extra)...if you have extra, but forget that one VERY BIG reason you have extra is because you happened to be born into a family and country that afforded you opportunity, or because God gave you talents, skills and intellect that enabled you to seize opportunity...if you ignore the fact that your beating heart and strength and stamina are not all your doing, but a gift from God, like the farmer, you'll say, *"All the extra belongs to me."*

If we believe that our extra is only for current consumption or securing our future, we're foolish! The farmer never considered that his days were numbered. He was wrapped up in his life; therefore, when he lost his life, he lost everything! Jesus says, *"That's how it will be for everyone who believes that everything you have is yours.* That's where some of us are tonight, isn't it? We believe the extra is all ours. We've never stopped to consider why God might have given it to us in the first place...

Jesus says...if that's you (me), there is an attitude adjustment that must take place. We need to rethink the way we see our extra!

In Jesus' words, we must learn to be rich toward God. What does it mean to be rich toward God?

Being rich toward God begins with gratitude...

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Lydia: When our children were young we tried to teach each of them sign language to help them communicate...like *"more please"*, *"all finished"*, *"thank you."* And for whatever reason it never really worked, so I thought we were failures (other parents pulled it off). Then Lydia came along, and for whatever reason it stuck! So...from the time she was very little, she's communicated with sign. One of her favorite words is *"Thank you."* I love it...someone gives her a snack or drink or helps her with a book, and I'll say... *"Hey Lydia, can you say thank you."* And she walks around the house doing this (sign)... *Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!*

Let me ask you...is that the posture of our hearts?

Like...when you woke up in a house this morning (most of us)...were you like, *"Thank you!"* When you get to your job on Monday mornings do you say, *"Thank you!"* When you get into your car, do you say *"Thank you!"* When you go to the grocery store are you like, *"God, thank you!"* When you check your bank account, do you say *"Thank you!"* or *"Where did everything go?"* When you count down the days to retirement, are you like, *"Thank you!"* Is that a daily habit of yours...thanking God for his provision in your life...

Gratitude is an antidote against measuring our lives by what we own!

When you really understand that God has been exceedingly generous toward you, it will evoke in you a heart of gratitude!

A life of overflowing generosity begins
With a heart of overflowing gratitude

If you want to be rich toward God, *"How do I see my extra?"* *"Does it evoke in me a heart of gratitude?"*

#2 - Then ask, *"What am I doing with my extra?"*

Next week, and for the rest of our series, we're going to be looking at this question!

Tonight...I simply want you to consider this question... *"What am I doing with my extra?"*

Luke 12:33 (Jesus) - *"Sell your possessions and give to those in need."*

Somehow in God's economy, when I take my extra and give it to someone else, that's what it means to be rich toward God!

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The farmer in the parable was wrapped up in his life and was only rich toward himself. When he lost his life, he lost everything. But remember the church in Macedonia. Though poor, they were wrapped up in causes close to the heart of God, therefore they had everything!

Ask yourself...how were they so economically poor, and yet abundantly rich in generosity?

2 Corinthians 8:9 – *“You know the generous grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty he could make you rich.”*

Those believers understood that regardless of their economic situation, they were rich beyond measure!

Gospel – We were poor...separated from God in our sin, without hope! God loved us and poured out his grace in our lives! Jesus Christ came into our world, put on flesh and died our death so we could live! We deserved to be shut out of God’s presence forever, but because of Jesus, we’re sons and daughters of the king!

Some of us haven’t considered generosity because we’ve never realized how exceedingly generous God has been toward us. You believe that generosity is something you’ll get around to when you have more! If so, you’ve forgotten the gospel that says you have everything you need and more!

When the gospel gets into your heart...your heart will overflow with gratitude...you will be released from worry, greed, and stinginess...and you will begin to overflow in generosity toward others...

Action:

As we close, it’s fitting that we begin by inviting God into this area of our lives?

Pray: *“God...I want to have a rich relationship with you! A relationship built on gratitude for all you’ve done for me. So, I invite you into my finances...the way I see them. The way I manage them. The way I give them away for your glory!*

Mission: Harbor...our mission is to help people find their way back to God.

Somehow, God in his sovereignty invites us to participate in his work in the

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**world. He is extravagantly generous toward us so that we will be
extravagantly generous toward others!**

Pray