

Overflow
Part 4: Joyful Generosity
May 30th & 31st, 2015

Welcome to Generosity Weekend! I love this weekend because we get to champion the work of incredible individuals and organizations that are committed to the causes of Jesus in our backyard and around the world!

And we get to stand alongside one another, giving our time and energy for the good of our neighbors and communities.

Our hope is that as you give and serve your heart becomes touched by one of these organizations, and you find yourself wanting to go back and invest your time and resources beyond this weekend.

You see...our dream is to become a people who Give Freely and Generously of our lives for the good of our neighbors and for God's glory!

Our dream is really Jesus' dream for His church. Jesus knows that when we begin to overflow in generosity toward our neighbors, the poor, and the mission of the local church, our giving has the power to change the world!

Big Idea: As we finish this series, I want to do my very best to show you that if you will take seriously Jesus' call to live a life of overflowing generosity, God is able to do more in and through your life than you can imagine!

Go with me to 1st Timothy 6:17, a letter written by the Apostle Paul to Timothy with a special message to encourage followers of Christ toward generous living!

*"Teach those who are **rich in this world** not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which is so unreliable..." 6:17a*

Rich – When Paul says, *"Teach those who are rich in this world..."* some of us hear this and go, *"Oh...Paul's not speaking to me; He is speaking to rich people!"*

You see...even though a majority of us are rich compared to the rest of the world, very few of us actually feel rich, right!

Lawns – There was a time when I felt rich. When I was thirteen years old, my brother and I started a lawn-care business. To this day, I don't know how we actually found customers who were willing to let two young teenagers mow their lawns, but we did. So, several days a week during the summer, we loaded our push mower into the trunk of my brother's 1984 Ford Fairmont that ran on propane (another story) and we traveled from house-to-house cutting grass. And each time we finished a lawn, we

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knocked on the front door and the customer gave us ten or twenty dollars. At the end of the week when we divided the plunder, there were times when I would hold one hundred dollars! In 1990, that was the equivalent of a hundred packs of baseball cards and a bottle of Coke!

Now...at the time I had no financial responsibility or commitments aside from keeping gas in our mower. As a result, I felt extremely rich!

Here's the point...if you want to be rich, get a job and move back in with your parents! The key to feeling rich isn't making a lot of money, it's having margin!

Africa & Tijuana – The only other times I've felt rich are when I've traveled to other parts of the world and experienced extraordinary poverty first-hand. If you've ever visited a third-world country, you've probably come face-to-face with the stunning contrast between the margin we experience in our day-to-day lives compared with those in the majority world.

For example, most of us only have to work five days a week to have seven days of food. In our home, we have seven people raiding the pantry every day of the week; sometimes it's mindboggling how quickly food disappears, and yet I still get a day off. **However, around the world, many people work every day just to eat?**

As a result, the majority of us have margin around our time and resources that the rest of the world only dreams of. **Though we may not feel rich...we are rich!**

So...there's a good chance that what Paul says next is intended for you if any of these apply to you...

You rolled into the parking lot today driving something with an engine in it...

If you own a home...

If you have a coffee habit...

If you own a wardrobe for different seasons...

If you're planning a family vacation that includes travel...

Paul is talking to you if you have a retirement plan and hope someday to have the ability to live without working...

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You see, until we can acknowledge that we are in fact rich, we won't be receptive to what God wants to do in our lives when it comes to money and generosity because we will have excused ourselves from the conversation!

Look again at verse 17...

*“Teach those who are rich in this world **not to be proud and not to trust in their money**, which is so unreliable...” 6:17a*

Proud – *“to cherish or have exalted thoughts.”*

Paul is saying, *“Don't cherish your wealth...don't think more highly of yourself because of what you own. Don't sit around dreaming about having more.”*

American Dream – Ted Widmer, who is a columnist for the Boston Globe, recently wrote an article called *Rethinking the American Dream*, in which he explains how the idea of the American Dream has shifted significantly since it was first crafted by James Truslow Adams in the early 20th century.

In 1931, amid the Great Depression, Adams wrote a bestseller, “The Epic of America” in which he described the American dream...

“not as a dream of motor cars and high wages...but a dream of a social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are regardless of their fortuitous circumstances of birth or position.” James Truslow Adams

Adams carefully defined the American dream as one of equality in personal dignity and opportunity.

This is the dream that has enabled millions of immigrants to find freedom, safety and opportunity in our country. This is the dream behind Martin Luther King Jr's, *“I Have a Dream Speech”* that led him to selflessly represent, defend, and ultimately liberate his African American brothers and sisters.

Yet, Widmer explains that today the American Dream has become identified by marketers and the media with things like wealth, upward economic mobility, and home ownership.

We're surrounded by messages that tell us that our personal significance and value is found in the stuff we own, and the status it affords us!

That if I drive this...or live in this...or shop like this, or vacation like this...or wear this...then I'm somebody!

This is why when we only have a little, we tend to feel little and unimportant compared to those who have more. However, as our earnings or savings grow, our sense of self-worth tends to grow with it. The more we have, the more we're inclined to think, *"My life is better now. My family will be safe now! My kids will get a good education. We will be healthy! My future will more secure!"*

You see, the more we have, the greater our tendency to trust in money and what it offers!

And Paul goes, "Don't do that...don't place your trust in something that is so unreliable!"

Over and over, the biblical authors warn us about trusting in money. Solomon, the wealthiest king who ever lived (whose wealth makes your 401K look like milk money)...

"Don't wear yourself out trying to get rich. Be wise enough to know when to quit. In the blink of an eye wealth disappears, for it will sprout wings and fly away like an eagle."

Proverbs 23:4-5

He's saying, *"Don't trust in wealth because one day everything you own is going to go away, or you're going to go away and won't be able to enjoy it any longer!"*

Please hear me...I'm not suggesting that having money or saving some money is foolish...in fact, Paul will go on to say that "God richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment."

Jesus told us repeatedly *"that we have a Heavenly Father who loves to provide us with good gifts, delights in it...brings him joy to provide you with things for your joy."* Ok...so don't mistake what I'm saying! There's nothing wrong with your house...or your car...or your upcoming vacation...or your clothes...or your retirement plan, ok! If not for God's merciful provision, we don't have any of that...

Money is not the problem! The problem is trusting in your money...cherishing your money...believing that somehow your money makes you more significant or secure...that's foolish for two reasons!

Trusting in money will steal your joy and peace. If you don't have money, you'll always be concerned about getting more, and if you finally get some money, you'll worry about losing it.

Trusting in money will steal your heart of generosity!

In fact...if you are wondering whether you trust in money, ask yourself one simple question. ***Can I joyfully give away my money in eye-popping amounts?***

That's the true test...Everybody enjoys stuff, but do I enjoy giving away my stuff! If you can't give joyfully...then there's a good chance you're trusting in your money, because you'll never give away the source of your significance, status, and security! So...how do we make sure that we're not placing our trust or hope in our money? How do we ensure that we're not pursuing a modern version of the American Dream, but instead are pursuing Jesus' dream for our lives and families? **Keep reading!**

*“Teach those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which is so unreliable. Their trust should be in God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment. **Tell them to use their money to do good.** They should be **rich in good works and generous to those in need, always being ready to share** with others.”* 1 Timothy 6:17-18

Why would Paul have to tell rich Christ-followers to be generous and willing to share?

In the United States, the more money a person makes, the less they give away!

Atlantic: A couple of years ago, the *Atlantic* magazine came out with an article showing that the wealthiest Americans—those with earnings in the top 20 percent—contributed on average 1.3 percent of their income to charity. By comparison, Americans in the bottom 20 percent—donated 3.2 percent of their income.

You see...statistics show that the more we have, the more temptation there is to hoard and save for security.

Paul says, “If you're rich, I want you to be rich toward those in need...always being ready to share!

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Notice, he doesn't say, *"If you're rich, I want you to get poor."* He says, *"If you're rich, God has uniquely entrusted you with a great responsibility to be rich toward others...toward Jesus-honoring causes!"*

Now, imagine what would happen if Paul's instruction to Timothy got into our hearts! Regardless of whether you're rich...or hope to be rich...or one day you wake up rich, if you took this to heart, it would change every aspect of your life!

Application

For the last several weeks, we've been telling you that you were created for generosity! My hope and prayer is that you have not only heard what has been said, but that you are prayerfully considering what it will look like for you and your family to overflow with generosity...

As we close...I want to give you a plan that will help you do just that! A plan that will lead you toward Jesus-honoring generosity!

This plan isn't original with me...I first heard it first from an author named Andy Stanley. It's such a clear and memorable way to practice Jesus-honoring generosity that any attempt on my part to make it original would muddy it...

Three P's of Overflowing Generosity

If you consistently take these three steps, you will become a person who joyfully reflects the generous heart of Jesus!

#1 – Priority Giving

Priority Giving – Priority giving means that I pre-decide that I am going to practice generosity! There's a notion that generosity is for people who are rich, but the truth is that if we wait to give until we feel rich, we'll rarely give!

No matter how rich or poor you feel, right now is the time to be generous!

Now, some of you are thinking, *"Jed, if you knew the reality of my financial situation...if you knew about my financial constraints or credit card debt or student loans or car problems, you would know that right now is about the worst time in my life to begin giving..."*

In Luke chapter 12...Jesus gave us this incredible invitation and promise...

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“See the Kingdom of God above all else, and he will give you everything you need.” Luke 12:31

There are usually two reasons we have a difficult time making generosity a priority. One, in our hearts we don't really seek the Kingdom of God above all else. If you want to know what you prioritize first...look at your bank account or Visa statement! If you want to know what I love most, don't see me as a pastor, talk about my finances...bambam

The second reason we struggle to make generosity a priority is that we don't trust our Heavenly Father to give us everything need (we're afraid...we're burdened!)

Jesus says that when we make the causes of the Kingdom of God the highest priority in our lives, we open the door of our life to God's provision! When you say, *“God, I'm going to trust and love you by giving to causes you care about...and I know you'll provide for me”*, things like fear, worry, and greed begin to lose their grip in your life...

If you want to make generosity a priority, make it the first thing you do every month! Give to causes that honor Jesus before you give to the mortgage company or Comcast, or Visa! It's a simple way to say, “God...I'm seeking you and your Kingdom above all else!”

#2 – Percentage Giving

Over and over, Jesus teaches that God is moved by percentages, not by dollars!

There was a time when Jesus was in the temple with his disciples. As people flooded into the temple, they dropped offerings into the containers next to the entrance. Many rich people gave large amounts of money, but a poor widow came along and dropped in two small coins!

The gospel-writer Mark used a Greek term to describe her offering to describe the smallest amount of currency known during that time. Factored out, her two small coins was the equivalent of six minutes worth of work time.

When Jesus saw this, he called his disciples over and what he said shows us how Jesus views generosity.

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"I tell you the truth, this poor widow has given more than all the others who are making contributions. For they gave a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she had to live on." Mark 12:43-44

She was richer toward God than all the others. You can imagine someone in the crowd saying, *"Yeah, but that guy put in \$1,000...what about the guy who put in \$10,000 or cashed in some of his mutual funds?"*

Jesus says, "Zeroes on the ends of numbers don't move me, percentages move me."

It's possible to be very rich and give a lot of dollars, but give a very small percentage! We shouldn't be impressed with the amount of dollars we give or become proud if our giving is large. Nor, should we grow discouraged if we're not able to give more...

Instead, we should ask, "Does my generosity reflect the heart of the widow who, though she was poor, gave extravagantly?"

Now...the next question is, "What percentage do we give?"

The writers of the Old Testament have a lot to say about 10%...the tithe! When you get to the New Testament, it seems that the tithe is replaced by something called *"Whole-hearted Generosity."*

"You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. For God loves a person who gives cheerfully." 2 Corinthians 9:7

The key to giving generously is to prayerfully pre-decide what percentage you're going to give!

Prayerfully determine what God is leading you to give! Get alone and pray; sit down with your spouse and together ask God, *"Where would you have us begin...then determine to give that!"*

It all belongs to Him...so you're giving back what is His!

#3 – Progressive Giving

The more we make, our tendency is to trust in our money! Our giving might increase, but our percentage of giving decreases!

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But if you're committed to progressive giving...as your financial situation changes throughout life, you'll change your giving percentage along with it. If you've been giving the same percentage for most of your life, consider raising it! If your giving has become comfortable...bump up your generosity and make it uncomfortable! Be open to the Holy Spirit's pressing in your life.

Beth and I practice this by prayerfully responding to God's leading as he gives us opportunity to give above and beyond our percentage giving...

Look at the individuals and organizations we're supporting this weekend and ask God to shape your heart around their cause...give to them!

Close

Paul closes with these words...

"By doing this (giving generously) they will be storing up their treasure as a good foundation for the future so that they may experience true life." 1 Timothy 6:19

True Life – Somehow, when you invest generously in causes close to the heart of Christ, you can be sure that those investments will outlive this life! You can be sure that not only is generosity changing you by making you more like Christ; generosity is having an eternal impact!

Imagine – knowing there are students at our college campuses that will come to know Christ as a result of your generosity – you'll meet them...

Imagine – meeting citizens of Lowell and women in Chelmsford whose lives will be transformed because of your generosity?

Imagine – children in Haiti given a chance to live without medical difficulties...healthy...full of life!

Don't underestimate what God can do when you open your hands and heart to give!

It could change the world!

Pray