

More, Part 3: Generosity

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VIDEO CLIP FROM WALL STREET MOVIE **(Begin immediately after choir anthem)**

We all want more. What do you want more of? In the first message of this series, we discussed how a desire for more stuff results in bondage to worry. We worry about not having enough stuff. Or we worry about losing our stuff.

Last week we looked at commandments that God gives us regarding worldly wealth. Some of our attitudes toward money can lead to spiritual death. Other attitudes lead us to life that is truly life.

Our “Wheel of Fortune” reminds us that on any given day we may experience fortune or misfortune. We never know. On the TV show you may win thousands of dollars or lose a turn or go bankrupt. You never know until you take a spin.

On our Wheel are attitudes that lead to life regardless of whether you experience fortune or misfortune. There are also attitudes that will lead us to spiritual death whether we experience fortune or misfortune.

I need a volunteer to spin the wheel and help us look at some of the attitudes.

Paul tells us that an attitude of generosity will lead us to life.

⁶ Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. ⁷ Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. ⁹ As it is written: "He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." ¹⁰ Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹ You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

2 Corinthians 9:6-11

Generous persons give out of gratitude. Paul says in verse 11: “your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.” Gratitude is an attitude that leads to life.

Recently actress Goldie Hawn appeared on the Doctor Oz show. She discussed her battle with deep depression for many years. This was quite a surprise because on TV appearances she always seems bubbly and happy—especially those of us who remember her as the ditzy blonde on “Laugh In.” She is a tremendously successful actress and extremely wealthy. What did she have to be depressed about? She appeared happy on the outside, but on the inside she was dying daily to depression—internally she was falling apart. She was depressed because her life was filled with anxiety. What if this happens or that happens? She worried about everything. Would she remain successful or could she flop at the box office? Could something happen, and she could lose all her wealth? Focusing on all the negative things that could happen caused her to be depressed.

She discovered a new attitude that lifted her from the darkness of depression. It is an attitude of gratitude. Every day she finds five things in her life to be grateful for. When she begins to focus on all the things she has to be grateful for it releases her from depression.

As we heard about this, Margaret suggested that at dinner each night we begin our conversation by listing three things we are grateful for that day. It is amazing how it changes the tone of our conversation. We bask in the glow of the gratitude. Then it will take us three or four minutes before we think about something to gripe about! But at least we begin on the positive note.

Gratitude results in generous giving. When we count our blessings from God, we want to express our gratitude by giving to him. Everything that we have

and that we are is a gift from God. A way to thank God for all our blessings is through generous giving to his work.

Ungrateful people tend to be selfish and hold on to what they have—no matter how little or how much they have. Gratitude is an attitude that leads to life.

Generous persons give joyfully. Paul says in verse 7 “do not give reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” Dub Rushing used to say: “Don’t give until it hurts. Give until it feels good.” Joyful giving leads to life.

In the preceding chapter, II Corinthians 8, Paul talks about an offering given by the Macedonian church to provide relief for Christians in Jerusalem that were experiencing persecution and great suffering. “Out of severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.” The Macedonian Christians were poor and were facing their own struggles for survival. Yet as soon as Paul told them about the suffering in Jerusalem, they immediately wanted to respond. And they did so joyfully and generously.

Paul lifts up the Macedonian Christians as his model for what it means to be a generous giver. Our instinct is to associate generous giving with the efforts of the wealthy and powerful people—Bill Gates and Warren Buffet. Yet Paul reserves his greatest accolades for the people at the bottom of the economic ladder. They were in extreme poverty and experiencing severe trial. Neither of those conditions deterred them from asking the question: “How much can we give?” Generosity “welled up” in them like water gushing from the ground. They even pleaded with Paul for the privilege of sharing in the offering. Now I’m

waiting for that to happen at LakeRidge. Some Sunday, I hope several of you stand up at the beginning of the service and plead, "Bill, take up an offering now. We can't wait to give!" The Macedonians recognized that it is more blessed to give than to receive. They were thankful for what they had. They did not focus on what they did not have. Therefore they gave with overflowing joy. Joyful giving leads to life.

Generous persons experience more of God through their giving. God is a giving God. "For God so loved the world that he gave." The more we give the more we become like God. God "enlarges the harvest of our righteousness." (verse 10) Righteousness means a "right relationship with God and others." Through our giving we experience more of God. Notice that Paul does not say that our giving will necessarily result in greater financial blessings. He talks about blessings that are greater than financial blessing. The blessing of right relationships is greater than financial blessing. We can lose our financial blessings. The blessing of a relationship with God cannot be lost. "There is nothing that can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus." Through giving we experience a deeper relationship with God.

Paul also says when we give, "God is able to make all grace abound to you." (verse 8) When we give, we open ourselves to experience more of God's grace. Again God's grace is a greater blessing than financial blessing. When we hang on tightly to what we have, then there is no room for God to give us more. God wants to bless us with his grace. Grace means getting what we don't deserve. The more we give, we free God to give us unexpected and undeserved

blessings that overflow in our lives. What are you missing out on that God wants to give you as his response to your generosity?

Paul says when you sow sparingly you will reap sparingly (verse 6). The more we give, the more we experience of God. According to the IRS the average taxpayer gives only 1.7% of his income to charity—less than 2%. Unfortunately this average also applies to most Christians. Even though many Christians have been taught that it is more blessed to give than to receive, they still sow sparingly, and they reap less of a harvest of God's blessings.

Like most businesses our church has had to make adjustments because of the economic situation. We cut about 8 percent out of our budget for 2012. We have three staff vacancies that we did not fill. In spite of that our church has blessed our lives and our community in many wonderful ways. Look at the handout titled "God's Work through LakeRidge UMC." This lists some highlights of God's work through our church in 2011. It also shows more of God's work we could do if the financial resources were available. (Read some examples from the handout).

We want to do more of God's work in 2012. We want you to experience more of God in 2012. On another handout titled "Experience More of God in 2012" we offer some ways that open you to more of God. These are based upon the vows of church membership that you take when you join our church. You promise to uphold the church with your prayers, your presence, your gifts, your service and your witness.

We all know that if you fail to plan you plan to fail. Do you have a plan to grow spiritually in 2012? Do you have a plan that will open you to experience more of God in 2012? When you leave this morning, we want you to have a plan to intentionally grow in each of these areas:

- **Prayer.** Think about how much time you usually pray each day? Do you say a blessing at one meal—about 15 seconds and that's it? Will you step up and make time for conversation with God to experience more of him?
- **Presence.** Recall how many Sundays you attended worship in the last four weeks. The majority of our members consider themselves regular attenders if they come 1 out of 6 Sundays. Worship is the only thing we do on Sunday that reminds us who we are and whose we are. Worship brings into focus God's purpose for our lives. When we are not present for 5 or 6 weeks, it is easy to forget what life is all about. Will you commit to take a step up in regular attendance? What would that look like for you?
- **Gifts.** What percentage of your income did you give to God's work through our church last month? Are you willing to step up and give 1 percent more of your income to God's work for the remainder of the year? Give generously and joyfully and you will experience more of God. Think of all the things our church could accomplish for God's work with additional resources. Let me share an email I received from a young couple in our church. "We increase our giving to the church on

the date of our wedding anniversary. The total percentage we give is based on the number of years we have been married. In June we will have been married 15 years and we will increase our giving to 15 percent. We love to do it, and it isn't very noticeable in the monthly budget when you just increase 1% at a time each year. "We love to do it." They have discovered the joy of giving. Another family in our church estimates their total income for the year and then writes a tithe check for the entire year and gives it in January. Not every family is in a situation to do that. But the principle they practice demonstrates that tithing is not a matter of money, it is a matter of trust. Set aside a percentage of your income that you will give to God first each pay period. Then trust him to help you manage to live on the remainder. God blesses us with more when we trust him and give to him first rather than from the leftovers.

- **Service.** How much time did you spend serving others last month? Did you help in children's ministry or youth ministry? Did you help in community outreach: sewing heart pillows, or helping with Clothes Closet or Good Samaritan ministry? How much time will you give each month to serve others inside or outside the walls of the church?
- **Witness:** Will you ask God to use you to help other persons come to know and experience his grace? I hope you are praying daily for at least two persons who need to experience God. Pray that God will

open the door for you to share your faith and/or invite someone to church.

We want to give you an opportunity to get your plan. I want to lead us in prayer. Following the prayer take a few moments to complete your plan to experience more of God in 2012. Then as we stand to sing our closing song, pass these toward the nearest aisle and our ushers will collect them. I want you to turn these in so that I can pray for you throughout the year. We will return the forms to you next week so that you can have copy of your plan to keep. What will be your plan to experience more of God in 2012?

Prayer

Music for 3-4 minutes to allow folks time to complete form

Closing Song while ushers collect forms