

Treasures in Heaven

“The Heart of Generosity”

Introduction

Hey everyone, I'm Mark and I want to welcome you to our service. This weekend we are kicking off a brand new series called, *Treasures in Heaven*. What if I told you there was a spiritual practice that could ignite your faith, make you more on fire for the things of God, unleash heavenly blessing in your life, and transform not only you but those around you? Would you want to hear more? Good! Because in this series we're talking about generosity.

Why a Series on Generosity? I can assure you that none of the reasons have to do with wanting more money. From day one of this Church, God has supernaturally provided through good times and bad and continues to do so. Which brings me to our first reason.

1. Within our Church Ohana there are countless individuals and families who give selflessly and, at times, sacrificially of their time, talents, and treasures. Our Church's impact would be greatly diminished without the generosity of these incredible people. We're praying this series would be a source of inspiration, encouragement, and a heartfelt confirmation of why you do what you do and a reminder of what blessings await you because of your generosity. That's number one.
2. We have many newcomers to the faith! Many people are finding their way to God or finding their way back to God in our Church! As you begin your faith journey with Jesus we want to provide you with a strong Biblical foundation on the beautiful art of living generously. Generosity is something that has always marked the people of God and as a newcomer to the faith you may have questions about why Christians give and what that truly means so together, we'll explore the wisdom of the Bible on this subject, which brings me to the third reason for this series.
3. We recognize that there's a fair share of misguided theology when it comes to giving and generosity. Some of you may have encountered churches where you felt pressured or coerced into giving. We've all heard disheartening stories of pastors and leaders who lost their way to greed and materialism, causing understandable hurt and mistrust around this topic. So we're praying this series will be a source of revelation and even healing for many.

Speaking of misguided theology, I heard a funny story recently about a couple of guys who were discussing their approach to giving. One man said, “Here's how I decide how much to give. I cash my paycheck in small bills. Next I go home and draw a circle on the floor. Then, I throw the money into the air and whatever falls into the circle is God's.”

The other guys said, “Ah, my way is even better. On payday I cash my check in small bills. When I get home, I toss the money in the air and whatever God catches He can keep!”

If I'm honest, when the Lord put it on our hearts to do this series there was a part of me that was hesitant to do it. Those of you who've been with us know this is a topic we rarely talk about. And I suspect that part of the reason stems from not wanting to be associated with those negative stories or being falsely accused of manipulating people. But in the midst of my doubts the Lord confronted me with a profound revelation I'll never forget. He said, “In trying not to rob My people, you are robbing My people.” As uneasy as I am to talk about this subject for fear of triggering some of you, I am more fearful of not teaching you the promises of God's Word and robbing you of your eternal reward! Because the truth is that the rewards of generosity far outweigh the cost and I don't want to deprive you or the people around you of the blessings God has in store!

The Treasure Principle

At the start of every series we like to share additional material that will take you deeper into what is being taught. If you're eager to discover the joys and rewards of generosity, complete with practical ways to kickstart your journey, I highly recommend, *The Treasure Principle*, by Randy Alcorn. I suggest families and spouses read this together and discuss how to implement these practices into your life. It's fairly short — I think it's under 200 pages but its principles have the power to change your life.

Treasures in Heaven

Our theme verse for this series comes from Matthew 6:19-21. This teaching comes straight out of Jesus' sermon on the mount. Teaching His disciples about life in His Kingdom, Jesus says,

19 "Do not store up for yourselves [material] treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in and steal; 21 for where your treasure is, there your heart [your wishes, your desires; that on which your life centers] will be also," (Matthew 6:19-21).

In this life, we face a choice. We can either focus solely on the here and now, or we can shift our perspective to an eternal one and aim for eternal rewards.

16 "Do not be overawed when others grow rich, when the splendor of their houses increases; 17 for they will take nothing with them when they die, their splendor will not descend with them," (Psalm 49:16-17).

Earthly riches won't accompany us beyond this life, which is why American Missionary Jim Elliot said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

The truth is that you can't bring your treasure with you to heaven, but the reality is, you can send it ahead of you! Did Jesus say not to store up for yourselves treasures? No! But He warns us not to store our treasures where they won't last. Jesus wants you to store up treasures but the kind that will last forever! Treasures in heaven. You see, Jesus sees the way the world's economy is going and He's letting us in on the biggest insider trading tip in the history of mankind. He's telling us to exchange our worldly currency (which will soon be worthless) for heavenly rewards that will never disappear! Jesus isn't anti-wealth! He just wants you to be rich in the things that really matter.

Imagine you're an American Soldier who is on deployment in the Middle East. You're told that you cannot take anything with you on your flight home, but you can transfer your earnings to your bank account in America. How many of you would fill your barracks with expensive furniture, art, gaming systems, and extravagant wardrobes? None! Instead, you'd wisely send your money where your home is and spend only what you need during your temporary stay.

Don't be deceived. This world is not your home! The Bible says we are sojourners, temporarily passing through. But during our brief stay we have the ability to send treasures ahead of us to heaven!

The Key to Heavenly Rewards: Generosity

So, what's the key to accumulating these heavenly rewards? It's simple: Generosity. The Bible speaks of two forms of generosity—generosity toward God and generosity toward others.

Tithing: The most common practice of giving to God is through tithing. A tithe means a tenth and we find this command given in Leviticus 27:30, *“A tithe (tenth) of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord.”*

This principle is also found in the book of Deuteronomy. How was the tithe used? We find the answer in Numbers 18:21, *“I give to the Levites all the tithes in Israel as their inheritance in return for the work they do while serving at the tent of meeting.”* So the tithe was used to support the Priests who were devoted to the service of the Lord. Paul supports this in 1 Tim. 5.

There are some who believe that tithing is an Old Testament concept that no longer applies to New Testament believers. Jesus appears to validate the tithe in Matthew 23:23,

23 “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former,” (Matthew 23:23).

Here Jesus corrects the Pharisees and teachers of the law for giving their tithe but neglecting more important matters. Jesus says we shouldn't neglect either. Something we know about Jesus is that when it comes to OT law, Jesus never lowered the bar, He raised it by making it a matter of the heart. Tithing is God's starting line, the gateway, to a life of generosity.

Offerings: Beyond tithing, offerings are additional gifts given willingly to support the Church's mission and other ministries. This is why most Churches designate a time for the giving of tithes and offerings. Paul writes about freewill offerings taken up in the Church.

6 “Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. 7 Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver,”
(2 Corinthians 9:6).

It is important to remember that this is not referring to the tithe but a freewill offering. A tithe is ten percent but an offering is something that is decided between the giver and God. Offerings should never be given through compulsion or reluctance but out of the overflow of your joy and gratitude in Christ. Going to verse 10 it says,

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.”

The Bible says that as we cheerfully give, God will increase our resources and enlarge our harvest. Timeout! This is starting to sound an awful lot like prosperity gospel Pastor Mark! This is why it is dangerous to take individual verses out of context. Because when we look at the whole passage it says,

11 You will be enriched 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).

When God blesses, it isn't to elevate our standard of living, it's to elevate our standard of giving. It isn't our opulence and wealth that will point people to Jesus, it's our sacrificial love and generosity. The more we give, the more God increases our ability to give. Giving opens our fists, not so God can take what we have but so that we can finally receive what He has for us.

Generosity to Others

The other way we store up treasures in heaven is through generosity to others. It's important to note that generosity is not limited to material gifts or financial contributions. Three ways that the Bible talks about generosity are in the sharing of our Time, Treasure, and Talents.

Time

For some people in your life, the gift of your time may be more valuable than money. Being generous with your time involves giving your personal attention, care, and presence to others. Our world is relationally bankrupt and so many people right around us are looking for deep connections, community, emotional support, and empathy. For some, the gift of quality time may go further in helping them encounter the love of the Father than all the money in the world.

Jesus said, "I was in prison and you came to visit Me," (Matthew 25). When we give of our time to love on those in need, Jesus said we are actually ministering to Him and storing up for ourselves treasures in Heaven. Romans 12:13 encourages us to share with those in need and practice hospitality. Maybe God is asking you to open your home for people to find community, maybe it's inviting a newer family over for a meal, perhaps God is calling you to give of your time to mentor a new believer, you could visit the elderly or someone in the hospital. Never underestimate how powerful your presence, but more importantly the Presence of God in you can be in blessing another person. Pray through how God wants you to be generous with your time.

Treasure

In other instances, the best way we can help is through giving money or material resources. Our Church partners with a number of organizations including the *Village of Hope* in Uganda who we'll hear more from at the end of this series. While it may help to give of our time to travel to Uganda (as some of us did) the most impactful way we can help is to support their mission through financial giving. In the event of the Maui fires, giving of time and talents may help in the long-run but there was also a direct and immediate need and many people, our Church included, gave financially to help.

"Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will reward them for what they have done," (Proverbs 19:17). The rest of the passage we referenced earlier says, ³⁴ "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed by My Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited Me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed Me, I was sick and you looked after Me, I was in prison and you came to visit Me,' ⁴⁰ "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of Mine, you did for Me,'

(Matthew 25:34-36;40).

The Bible lists so many blessings for those who give generously to those who cannot repay them including, being repaid (Proverbs 19:17); blessing (Luke 6:38); the ability to minister to Jesus (Matthew 25:35-40); God's deliverance in times of trouble (Psalm 41:1); guidance, satisfaction and strength, (Isaiah 58:10-11; empowered for good works (2 Corinthians 9); God's blessing on your work and endeavors (Deuteronomy 15:10), and the list goes on and on. A saying you hear time and time again in the Church, "We thought we were being a blessing but we were the ones who got blessed!" You cannot out-give God. It is far better to live off of 90% or even 50% of your income under the will of the Father than to live off 100% outside of it.

Talent

The third way we can be generous to others is through our talents. Similar to time, this is a non-monetary way we can bless others through our skills, knowledge, and expertise. Giving of our talents can alleviate people's struggles, it can elevate others in their own skills and abilities, it can help them to grow in their understanding, and so on.

⁶ "We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; ⁷ if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸ if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully," (Romans 12:6-8).

Conclusion

The success of our Church cannot be attributed to a Pastor or even a team of Pastors. It cannot be attributed to our ministries or programs or events. The success of our Church comes from the sum total of countless individuals, giving countless hours, and dollars for the King. There are teachers who are in the classroom Monday through Friday for work and then come to Church and use their teaching gifts to usher our kids to Jesus, there are people who work labor-intensive jobs all week and still show up on Sunday to greet people in the hot sun or direct people to a parking stall. There are people who give up family time in order to love on those who are lonely. We have parents on Thursday nights coming to Youth Group in uniforms of various kinds because they sat in traffic and came straight from work often picking up food for the night along the way. So many people are giving sacrificially of their time, their treasure, and their talents all for the glory of God. And you know something? Reward is the furthest thing from their mind. Why? Because they've already been rewarded. Their generosity is merely an overflow of the generous God they've encountered.

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich," (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Jesus gave everything for us. It was through His generosity that we are who we are. We love because He first loved us. We give because He gave everything for us. And when you step into the flow of the outpouring of His love, you can't help but pour it out to others.