

Worry-Free Generosity
Generous Series Week 3
November 6, 2016

Welcome/intro/vision

This is week 3 of our Generous Series, we're talking about the very real fact that Generous people change lives and generous people change the world

And when we looked at the Biblical story we saw that the heart of God is that he's a Generous Giver, that's the essence of who God is at his core

And then we saw that the essence of who we are is that we're made in God's image. So if God's a generous God at his core, then you and I are designed to be generous at our core, too

And this is why it brings us so much joy to be generous—because when we're being generous we're behaving in line with who God made us to be in the beginning

In fact, let's think about this—how many of you have ever known someone who you would describe as GENEROUS-hearted: time, talents, treasures, words, love, anything?

Have you ever known someone who was generous-hearted who was a miserable human being?
Generous people are settled, joyful people because they're doing what God made them to do! In contrast how many of you have known miserly people who were miserable?!?

So we're made to be generous and we've been summarizing our work together as a church this way:

that we're here to worship the generous God and in so doing to become generous people that we might together be as generous as we can be to as many as we can be, both internally and externally, so that all people might come to know and worship this generous God

And then last week we talked about the fact that if we're margin-less we cannot be generous.

If all of our time and all of our money is already spoken for, already committed, then it makes it very difficult to be generous EVEN IF WE WANT TO BE

One of the things that I appreciate about our community here is that most of us ARE generous people—we LIKE being generous! But it's hard to be generous when our resources are already over-committed and stretched too thin

If we were created in God's image to be generous men and women

then we have to find ways to create margin in the two key areas of our lives of time and money in order to have something to give away

And so I gave you a homework assignment for this week: this little worksheet to track for just a short period of time our two key resources of time and money

With the goal being that we might be knowing where the time and money are going, so that we might find ways to create a little more margin in order to be free to be generous

Here's my time log from last week, and it didn't take long for God to test me to see if I really understood this concept of the purpose of margin was to have something to be generous with

Each Monday morning, our executive pastor Steve Tamayo and I have an epic 3-hour long meeting. We debrief Sundays, we talk about the week ahead, everything

Now, Sundays are long days for both of us, and so we intentionally start that meeting at 9:30 a.m. in order to have a little bit of MARGIN on Monday mornings to recover, sleep in a bit, enjoy time with family, whatever

So Monday morning I was home enjoying this margin, drinking my coffee
and we've got two neighborhood girls over at our house because their parents had a parent-teacher conference and we were of course glad to watch them for a bit

It's a really warm morning and the kids are outside playing, and one of the girls has a cloth bag with her prized teddy bear and blanket

And as they were playing out in the cul-de-sac, she set them down on the ground right next to her recycling bin.

And at one point, kids come running into the house, declaring that Violet's blankie and bear have been abducted by the recycling guys because the bag was right next to the bin!

And right then I've got a choice to make: I can continue to enjoy a leisurely Monday morning at home, or I can hop in the car and try to chase down the recycling truck who has already left our neighborhood and has gone who-knows-where next!

And here's my honest confession: NO part of me wanted to leave my cup of coffee and jump in the car chasing after blankie and teddy in the recycling truck!

But when the kids came screaming in, I had just finished filling out my time log from the day before and the stupid message that I had talked about the day before about having margin in order to be generous was right there in my face!

So I'm trying to be cheerful as I put down my coffee and jump in the car.

I go one direction and can't find them

My wife Kelly finds the phone number for the company, gets in touch with dispatch, they tell her what the next two neighborhoods are where they're going

I try to go to the second one to head them off at the pass drive through the whole neighborhood, but I can't find them anywhere

At this point, I'm ready to call it. I call home to pass along the bad news. Kelly says, "why don't you call the dispatch again and find out if they're still close by?"

And I'm like, "because I don't FEEL like calling dispatch!" But I reluctantly call them, they tell me what neighborhood they're in, I get lost trying to find it, but then Google maps comes through for me

And as I'm finally pulling up to the entrance of the neighborhood, I spot a big, grey recycling truck facing out like they're about to pull out of the neighborhood

And I start honking and blinking my lights so they don't pull out and make me chase them further

But as I get closer, I see the driver, he's waving a pink teddy bear out the driver's side window and smiling!

I pull up, get the bear, thank them profusely for fishing it out, I call home to report the good news, all the kids are shrieking with joy, I swing by home and drop it off, get down to the office just about on time for our meeting

And that afternoon I get home and there is a card from Violet that I've got here—from Violet to Alex, thank you for saving my lovie and bear

With a great picture of my car chasing down the monstrous recycling truck

Monday morning, I was called upon to give some of my margin away to chase after an accidentally recycled teddy bear

And while I initially wasn't all that thrilled about it—the smile on that little girl's face when I gave her back her bear and this little card, brought me all kinds of joy

Much greater joy than an extra 20 minutes around the house drinking coffee and checking sports scores, better than answering emails or being productive

When we create margin in our lives and are open to positioning even just a small portion of it to be given away, you never know what kind of adventures in generosity God might invite you into

Jesus was relentless about the joy of generosity and the wonders of it. And while generosity wasn't invented by Jesus, what Jesus did was make generosity cool.

Jesus takes the concepts of a loving generosity and he takes them from the margins to the center—Roman pagans weren't famous for their generosity, but Jesus's teachings eventually over-ran all of Rome and all of western culture

Jesus unleashed an unprecedented generosity revolution through his life and his teachings that has so shaped western culture that over the past 2,000 years

Jesus people have built more hospitals and cared for more orphans and widows and prisoners than any other people group on the planet and even those who AREN'T Jesus people think it's cool to serve the less fortunate—that's because Jesus made it cool!

And today, we're going to look at one of those teachings that turned all of the western world upside down in Luke chapter 12

Luke 12 contains a wide collection of teachings and at one point Jesus says in verse 22 ***22 Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. 23 For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes....***

And then Jesus goes on to give an illustration from the ravens and the flowers of the fields and how well provided for they are by God, and he summarizes our passionate, all-consuming pursuit of our own provision in these ways:

...do not worry about it. 30 For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. 31 But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

Jesus here is talking mostly to peasants, mostly to poor people—I mean, mostly really poor people

And as they're eeking out a daily existence, everything about their daily experience tells them that life is basically just getting your next meal and keeping clothes on your back and on the backs of your family members—that's all there is to most of their lives, most of their days

And to this group of people, Jesus declares great news: *life is more than this*. More than just eeking out an existence, and making sure all there's food on the table

He's inviting them to live in light of the kingdom of God and in light of a good, good Father who in his core is generous

Some of you are in a very similar situation to Jesus's original hearers

the things that are consuming your internal bandwidth and dominating your thoughts are that you're worried about where food is going to come from this week and you're worried about clothes, we know you're here and we're glad you're here. Thank you for being a part of our community.

For others of us, food and clothes aren't the things that we're worried about.

And to you, I think Jesus might swap out these nouns, from food and clothing to whatever it is that's eating up your internal bandwidth and that you fret about: jobs and family troubles and health concerns and financial worries

We've all got stuff right in front of us that would consume our internal bandwidth and our mental and emotional energies if we let it

And what Jesus says is this: if you will put the Generous God and his Kingdom first in every single area of your life, these other things will be added, will be given to you, you will be to some extent and in some way, taken care of

He's calling us to a radical faith and trust in God, because your good Father knows what you need.

But so many things war against us doing this, in part because just like the people who first heard this teaching, the everyday stuff of life presses in on us, doesn't it?

we continually come up against things that keep our eyes down and focused on something right here and right now right in front of us

This morning we need to hear Jesus tell us there's something more at work. There's something bigger, more powerful, more important in play.

Jesus tells us that we should put those unseen and invisible forces and places FIRST in our lives—to seek FIRST the kingdom of heaven, and to trust that the generous God will provide for us

In my small group, we had this great conversation this past week trying to wrap our minds around WHAT this kingdom of God or kingdom of heaven is or what it looks like

And so we came at it this way: there are lots of kings and lots of kingdoms people are living for, right?

The kingdom of money and stuff, of power and titles and advancement; we might name the kingdoms of applause and approval;

we've even got the kingdom of ME, where I'm king and just get to do whatever I want and nobody bothers me!

And each king and each kingdom has a way of life, actions and behaviors that are a part of belonging to that kingdom.

For example, when we devote ourselves to the kingdom of career advancement, there are a set of values and behaviors that go along with that—work becomes everything

When we devote ourselves to the kingdom of money, there a set of behaviors and values that go along with that

if we're about the kingdom of other people's approval another set of behaviors that go along with that

And when we build our lives around those things, we can sometimes get what we thought we wanted, but it often comes with collateral damage to us and/or the people around us.

And then Jesus comes along and says this: “There’s another kingdom. A bigger kingdom. The kingdom you were originally designed to participate in and align your life with: the kingdom of God

The kingdom of God is the place where God reigns, where we are his sons and his daughters, where we are free from those lesser and smaller kings and lesser and smaller kingdoms

and our lives and all of our decisions are oriented around that God and those behaviors driven by faith, hope, and love

And there are sacrifices to be made to participate in this kingdom, just like there are for every other kingdom, but those sacrifices are good and they are worth it, because the results of or the fruit of life lived in this kingdom and in this way are always, always, always good.”

The kingdom of God is this larger, wonderful kingdom where God invites us into something beautiful, bold, eternal, more real and more solid than money or approval or your career.

And for many of us, this feels a little foreign and hard to wrap our minds around

Because what we’ve got right in front of us is what we understand and know and can handle and that’s what seems to be most important—the stuff that we’re obsessing about

And what happens is that we cultivate habits of mind that act like a retractable dome over our hearts—here’s a picture of a retractable roof stadium You can open or close it depending on the weather

And in case we’ve forgotten, most of us are born with the roof wide open--we’re born into a wonderful world, and most kids have some inclination to marvel at the bigness of the cosmos and the stars and animals

But as we grow to be adults, we stop looking at the stars and start stressing over food and clothes and careers and our vision drops and drops and drops

And over time what happens is the dome over our lives closes off the stars and we think that this world is all that there is.

And there are plenty of voices telling us there’s no life outside of this dome, that inside of this dome is all there is

even though deep inside of us, none of us stops longing for bigger meaning, bigger purpose, and a bigger power that can come into this messy world and redeem it and make it right

And there’s plenty of people stuck inside this dome with us who are all scurrying around living for all the kingdoms available to us inside this dome:

Money, power, comfort, people, family, nation, politics, work—all of these littler kingdoms are available to us under the dome, cut off from God
And none of these are bad things on and of themselves

But if we've closed the dome then we're cut off from God and the one eternally glorious kingdom that you and I were made for.

All the things that we most deeply long for: purpose, meaning, significance, redemption, healing, and the power to make things new—all of those things are only available to us if we're willing to open up the dome of our hearts and enter into the kingdom of God.

If you are living in the closed dome, you SHOULD be stressed and the ONLY sane thing is to worry.

Because if this is all there is, then we should all be scurrying about eeking out whatever existence we possibly can

And here on election eve, if this dome is all the kingdom that we know, we should be stressed! The king we elect this week and the power that king has to shape life in this dome could make it miserable for lots of us

For a moment this morning I want you to consider that LIFE Is MORE than food and clothes, more than work and money and power and friends and managing the kids and nice vacations and a few pleasures here and there

Life is MORE than just being nice to people and loving my family, life is MORE than our favorite t.v. show, more than volunteer work, more than just being left alone to do whatever I want to do

And for a moment to consider that there's a larger king and a larger kingdom that puts this week's election firmly in its proper place

and if you're stuck inside a closed dome, I want to plead with you that you're missing out on all the stuff that makes life actually worth living forever and ever amen

This morning, for just a second, I want to invite everyone to rip open the roof over our hearts and our minds and consider the stars.

To consider a world and a kingdom of God that is loaded up with wonder and beauty, with more meaning and purpose than we can possibly imagine

There is more to life than this material world.

Jesus called it the kingdom of God. And Jesus tells us, "Put this first." If you put this first, it'll change everything. If you put this first, you'll get that perspective that helps you to see reality for what it is.

If you put this first, you'll be able to see life is more than food and your body is more than clothes

Put this first and you'll be under the loving watch care of a perfect and generous King, a perfect and generous Father who loves you, who made you, and who wants to meet all your deepest longings for significance, meaning, purpose, redemption with his marvelous grace

To which you and I might say, "Okay, but what does that MEAN? There's this big invisible God, and he's got a big invisible kingdom

Let's say for the sake of this conversation I'm willing to go along with this whole thing, I'm willing to consider it or believe it

Or for some of you, you DO believe it, but the question still remains

What does this look like? What does it mean to seek first the kingdom of heaven? How do I get there?

Jesus, of course, anticipates this question, and here's the response he gives:

32 "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.

Pause here briefly for a side-note: This is one of the most delightful phrases in the whole Bible. To anxious, over-run, poor peasants who are over-run by the Roman army, a despised minority in the vast Roman Empire

Jesus speaks these wonderful, generous words: do not be afraid, little flock. Beloved, little flock, beloved people

Why? Because this huge kingdom, this wonderful kingdom of God, this vast eternal kingdom of God

God the Father has been pleased to GIVE it to you. Share all of it. With you. What kind of God is this? What kind of King is it that would share his kingdom like that? A good one. A loving one, a GENEROUS, GENEROUS God

For some of you, this is why you're here today: do not be afraid, son or daughter of the most high God, for your Father is a good and generous king and he has been pleased and delighted to GIVE you the kingdom of God, to invite you in and share in it with him

And since God is so generous and because there's this wonderful, eternal, resource-rich kingdom that God is eager to share with you

here's the revolutionary and mind-blowing thing that those who are receiving this kingdom should do and here's how we start to orient our hearts and lives around it:

33 Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. 34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

How do I do this whole seeking first the kingdom of God thing? What's the path to getting there? How do I access the kingdom of God? [read again]

It's a really clear and basic principle: if we want our hope and our hearts to migrate into trusting and seeking the one place where we can be utterly refreshed and renewed forever and ever

You invest in it: ***where your treasure is, your heart will be also***

Don't just think about it. Don't just wonder about it. Don't just go to a church service occasionally to try to get a little perspective. Don't just try to say a few prayers here and there

If we want to steer our hearts towards the eternal, wondrous kingdom of God, then we put our money right there

We invest in that kingdom—it's a safer investment than any other investment you could possibly make. Look! It's a treasure that won't ever, ever ever wear out, not into all eternity!

No thief can steal it! No moth can eat it! No boss can fire you from it! No stock market crash can take it from you! No election can decide whether or not you get it! No person can decide they don't like you any more and take it away from you!

This is the eternal, unshakeable kingdom of God that you're being called to put first! And the way to get there is by investing in it financially. Because where your treasure is, that's where your heart will be also

This past week, I encouraged you to track where your two key resources of time and money are going—these are the two key resources God's given to you in order to have something to be generous with

Here's a question that might show you what other kingdoms and what other kings are fighting for your heart: Where is your treasure going?

For me, the vast majority of my money goes towards my house and home:

between the mortgage payment, the electric bill, stocking groceries in that house, and buying clothes that hang in that house, the majority of my money goes towards my home

Is that where my heart is? For sure and definitely—in terms of things on this earth, that's where my heart is.

Is that a good thing? For sure and definitely! Of course it's good for me and for us to feed and clothe our kids!

Could that become what a false and competing kingdom that I over-invest in? Oh for sure and most definitely.

My home is not the kingdom of God. And up to a certain point it is good and right to invest in my home and my kids and take care of everyone there

BUT it is REALLY easy to JUSTIFY spending ridiculous amounts of money and time and resources on the home in part because it's such a noble cause!

But ultimately Jesus says seeking first the kingdom of the home is NOT what God wants for me OR for my family—seeking first the kingdom of home does not have the power to do what the kingdom of God can and does do!

We, together, are to position our lives and our finances in such a way that our treasure is leading our hearts into putting the kingdom of God first and foremost, because where our treasure is, our hearts will be also

That doesn't mean we're running our house at poverty level. But it does mean that we are a work in progress, fighting to keep our household expenses under control in part so that we might be able to GIVE to the kingdom of God.

Because where your treasure is, your heart will be also

Our hearts are fickle things. And if we want to steer them towards eternal things, if we're open to and hungry for a big sky and a bigger kingdom than the small kingdoms of this earth

Then we're going to have to put enough of our treasure in that direction that it shapes us and molds us

In our small group this week we were saying that if there's nothing distinctively generous or different about my bank statement

particularly as compared to other people in my same general income level and tax bracket, like we said last week, we've all got different sized fields and different amounts

but if there's nothing distinctively generous about how I'm handling the money that God's given me to scale in my world, then there's something off

If I'm not finding a way to arrange the money God's given me so that I might know and experience the intentional joy of generosity, then it's likely that my heart and my life isn't as fixed on the kingdom of God as Jesus is inviting me to do here.

This morning, two Take-WITH's for you to consider as you go about this week:

1. *Where is your treasure currently and what does that tell you about your heart?*

Jesus is giving us this basic principle: our heart follows our money. It's not a math formula, it's just a principle and every principle of human behavior has some exceptions

But by and large, the place where we spend the most money tells us something about where our hearts are

And this morning, I want to invite you to consider where your treasure is currently leading your heart—which kingdoms are you investing financially and what does that tell you about the commitments of your heart?

And the follow-up question:

2. Do I need to make any treasure-investment changes in order to root my heart way from worry and more fully in the kingdom of God?

Many years ago I was making much less and we had little kids and money was super tight and I felt my anxiety level each month as I sat down to pay the bills was rising and rising each month

And as I was praying about this, I felt that my worry and my heart were all fixed on the wrong things. And I needed to be set free from it. But all the praying by itself wasn't changing it. I needed to DO something different

So I decided to give extra money to the next kingdom-oriented thing that I came across

Within a week I got a letter asking for me to support a missionary headed overseas. And I wrote the most spiritually significant \$50 check that I had ever written in my life.

I wanted to seek first the kingdom of God. My heart was slow to move that direction, so I was going to re-direct my heart in that direction by giving financially first and letting my heart follow.

Are there decisions I need to make with my money that will help to re-shape my heart away from my worries?

This week, consider these questions, and see what the Lord might do. This morning, we close with an opportunity for us to open up the domes over our hearts and receive the grace of God with communion

On the night Jesus was betrayed, he was seeking first the kingdom of God, submitting himself to the lead of the Father, and it led him to this place

The place of laying his life down for all of us, he was going to give himself fully to his good, good Father and trust him that on the other side of this death was a resurrection

And so he went. But first he gave this meal to his disciples and we take it this morning, too. He said this bread is my body broken for you, eat this in remembrance of me

He said this cup is my blood shed for you for the forgiveness of sins, drink this in remembrance of me.

Then he went to the cross, entrusting himself to this good Father, and he died for you and for me, for the forgiveness of our sins and to conquer our worst enemies of sin, death, and the evil one

And three days later, he rose again from the grave that we might have access to this eternal, wondrous kingdom

Invite you this morning to look outside of the dome and to see the vast, eternal, wondrous kingdom of God to place your trust in it

Elements are at tables, whenever you're ready move to them: eat and drink there at the tables and then leave your cups there. Bread is gluten-free and cup is grape juice so everyone's invited

PRAY