

Generosity Sermon 2

Dan Hamel
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We are in week two of a series called *From the Overflow*, and we are talking about living a life of abundant generosity. I want to celebrate some of the ways I've seen God at work the past week. A nine-year-old girl was here last week and listened to the sermon. She heard our desire to make room for more kids in the children's area. She asked her parents what 30% of \$80 was. She has \$80 in her savings, and she wanted to give 30% of it as an expression of worship and to help make room for more of her friends. I was crying as this family told me the story. We have an 18-year-old senior in our church. Last week, he went to his high school pastor and said he had been in the worship service that morning and wanted to give a gift, not only to honor God, but to help make room for his friends to be able to worship at The Creek. He then handed our youth pastor \$1,000. Absolutely incredible. In addition to those beautiful gifts of faith from the next generation, we had a family in our church who looked at the infrastructure of our building—the heating and air conditioning units, the least exciting part of ministry—and they pledged several hundred thousand dollars to help our church building continue to run.

I want to say a word of appreciation and honor. Every conversation I've had with people at The Creek was, "Thank you for simply teaching what God's word says about our approach to finances." "Thank you for helping us approach this as an aspect of worship." "We are so excited about the growth and momentum at the church; we want to be a part of what's next." To have a church that responds that way is encouraging beyond words. Well done.

Last week, the focus of the sermon was *generosity as worship*. This week our focus is *generosity as witness*. If last week was about leveraging money as a way to personally worship God (God, I want to honor you with every area of my life, including money), this week is about leveraging money as a way to help others worship God (I want to invest my resources in such a way that is not only a personal expression of worship, but I want to invest in a way that helps others come to worship you as well).

What I want to show you today is that all throughout the Bible there were people who gave, not only to honor God, but also to fund ministry and enable others to learn about the life-changing hope of Jesus. This happened as soon as Jesus was born. When Jesus was still in an infant child, a group of magi, wisemen from the East, were led by a star to Bethlehem, and the Bible not only tells us that when these magi met Jesus they bowed down and worshiped him, we specifically see that "On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh" (Matthew 2:11). They brought the most valuable gifts they had. The gifts weren't only symbolic; they were practical. King Herod was trying to kill Jesus and his family. God told Joseph in a dream they should go to Egypt for safety until Herod died. They lived in hiding for two years in a foreign land. Joseph was a day-laborer and didn't have a job waiting for him down there. He and Mary didn't have a ton of savings to pull from. Jesus survived the first two years of his life off the generosity of the magi who brought these gifts to him at his birth.

This didn't happen only at Jesus' birth; it happened throughout his ministry as well. When we think about Jesus' ministry, sometimes we are tempted to assume that all of Jesus' needs were somehow miraculously provided from heaven. Like food and travel expenses and lodging—we assume Jesus simply prayed then they suddenly appeared out of thin air. That's not how it worked! Look at this snapshot from the ministry of Jesus in Luke 8:1-3:

Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women: Mary (called Magdalene);

Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

Did you see that last line? "These women were helping to support them out of their own means." How was it possible for Jesus and his twelve apostles to focus entirely on ministry and not have to work a normal nine-to-five job? Who helped to financially underwrite the preaching of the good news of the kingdom of God and the casting out of evil spirits? All that ministry was done, all those lives were changed, because these women, who had more resources than most, gave financially to make it possible. They were gospel patrons.

This didn't happen only during the ministry of Jesus; it happened in the early church as well. Here are some descriptions from Acts 2 and 4 of the early church community during the first several weeks, months, and years after Jesus died and rose again:

- They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.
- God's grace was powerfully at work
- Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.
- All the believers were one in heart and mind.
- There were no needy persons among them.
- With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.
- The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

That's what was happening in the life of the early church! Teaching, prayer, God's grace, miracles, awe and wonder, unity, no needy people in their midst, bold proclamation of the gospel, the salvation of so many people! How did that happen:

- They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need (Acts 2:45).
- For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them and the money was distributed to anyone who had need (Acts 4:34-35).
- Barnabas sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet (Acts 4:36-37).

Everyone wants to be a church like the early church! Everyone wants that kind of community, that kind of unity, those kinds of miracles, that kind of power, that much salvation! Everyone wants it, but how did it happen? God didn't just snap his fingers and send what they needed from heaven. People had money and possessions. People took their money and possessions, and then cheerfully and joyfully gave to fund this dynamic ministry. This wasn't simply life-changing ministry. This was the first church, this was the first domino, this was world-changing, history-changing ministry. It was all made possible because people gave! Generosity wasn't only for the sake of worship; it was for the sake of witness.

Skip a few chapters later in the book of Acts to chapter 13. We leave Jerusalem and are in a town called Antioch.

Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul (*Paul the apostle*) for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. (Acts 13:1-3)

When the Bible says that they “sent them off,” don’t think that simply means they walked them to the door and waved. It means they sent them with all the resources and finances they needed for the ministry. They went on a nine-month long mission trip [view the online sermon to see a map of this mission trip and the one mentioned next] and this church paid for the entire thing. Then they came back, told the church all the good work they had done, and the church sent them off again. This was a three- year-long mission trip. Everyone looks at the Apostle Paul as, after Jesus, the most influential Christian to ever live—the greatest missionary, the greatest church planter, the greatest disciple maker, author of thirteen letters of the Bible. What made that possible? Not 100%, but a lot of his ministry was funded and made financially possible because people in the church of Antioch gave to their local church, and their local church then supported Paul’s work as a missionary. It was giving to a local church that made much of Paul’s ministry possible.

During Paul’s missionary journey, he wrote a letter to his friends in Corinth. This was a church he planted; these were people he led to faith in Christ. He told them about a famine that had hit Jerusalem, that all the poor people in that city were in immediate need; they were facing abject poverty and needed food, so Paul went about raising funds for them. This is what he said to the Corinthians: “Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so...I know your eagerness to help (2 Corinthians 8:10, 9:2). I love these lines: “you had the desire,” and “eagerness to help.” Giving wasn’t something they were forced to do; it was something they wanted to do. Again, this is a great moment to celebrate and honor you as a church for responding to last’s week message about worshiping God with our money in such a commendable way. Nobody had to feel like their arms were being twisted; they were eager to help! “This service [generous financial gift] that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God” (2 Corinthians 9:12-13). Paul is saying, “Because you give, others will give thanks to God and others will praise God.” Giving is worship, but it’s more than just worship—it’s leading others to worship! Generosity is witness.

This is our hope when people give to The Creek. I shared these things last week, but I want to share them again, because they are so exciting. I am excited to let you know about big things happening at The Creek. This is what attendance trends have looked like at The Creek the last few years. [View the online sermon to see graphics showing attendance growth since 2021.] By God’s grace, the growth isn’t just in here, it’s with our children and students, too. All your giving has gone to increase the witness of our church and help hundreds and hundreds more people have a life-changing encounter with Jesus.

While this is great and we are thankful for it, with 15-20% growth year over year, we have been running out of space. On 35 out of the 43 weekends of this year, we’ve had to turn kids away from their room in the children’s ministry because we are out of space. Every weekend that isn’t a holiday or summer weekend, our children's staff has to say, “We’re sorry, we are out of room.” We don’t want to have those conversations anymore. We’ve also had several weekends out of the year where this worship center is at max capacity and we have to go to auxiliary seating. For most of this year, our facilities have caused us to hit a lid on how many people we can reach and serve. So we’ve been spending a lot of time thinking and praying about how to facilitate all of this growth, and how we can make room for more people. It comes down to five key areas. Take a look at the *31 Days of Generosity* card that is on your seat to follow along.

- Update the children’s ministry space.
- Expand the student ministry space.
- Remodel the adult worship center to accommodate 1,000+ more people.
- Repair infrastructure.
- Build a family play center.

Every one of these investments is going to increase our witness, to help us not only to make room for 1,000 more people, but also to be able to serve families in our community and shine the light of Jesus all throughout Indianapolis. The overall cost for these projects combined is a little more than \$4.4 million. The good news is that we are completely debt free and have \$1.2 million ready to deploy to these opportunities. That means that we are hoping for an increased generosity at the end of this year and for the next few years that will allow us to accomplish each of these objectives. Generosity will be an expression of our worship, and it will enhance our witness. My hope and prayer is that we would all pray and ask God what he would have us do in regard to this. Last week we talked about how for those who aren't giving, the right step might be to start giving. For those who are giving a little, the next step might be to move to a tithe, a full 10% to the Lord. For those who are tithing, the right step could be to continue to grow in generosity. Whatever the next step is, take it, not just for worship, but for witness!

Whenever Keren and I do pre-marriage counseling with couples, finances is always one of the topics we spend time talking about. Most couples have someone who is a saver and someone who is a spender. By show of hands, how many savers do we have in the room? How many spenders do we have in the room? You cause all of us savers heart attacks! Sometimes we tend to think that there is a dichotomy when it comes to our approach to money: spender versus saver. But the truth is, no matter where you are on this spectrum, there is a third element at work for Christians: kingdom investor. Whether you are more inclined to add to the bank account and the retirement account, or more inclined to add to the shopping cart, God calls everyone to make sure we are adding to our investment in the kingdom, that we are putting our financial resources toward what not only provides a short-term return or a long-term return but an eternal return. When it comes to finances, God wants us to focus not only on ourselves, but on him, on others, and on eternity.

This is a radical shift from the trend of our generation. There are social scientists that track changes in values based upon the usage of words in literature. Take a look at the change in word use in American literature over the last few generations with "give" versus "get." [View the online sermon to see the chart.] We are near an all-time low in our focus on giving, and an all-time high in our focus on getting. That's not what God is calling us toward! Listen to what 2 Corinthians 9:6 says: "Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously." Every farmer wants a lavish, abundant harvest. The only way to have a huge harvest is to plant a huge amount of seed. The only way to have a massive spiritual and eternal reward is to, just like all the people in the Bible we talked about, invest in eternal things.

I have a good friend named Brandon Beard. He was in town this week and we were catching up and he started telling me a story about his grandfather, Harry Beard. I said, "You've got to be kidding me. His name was Harry Beard?" It was. Harry Beard was a pilot who served in WWII. He did not have a beard. His job was to fly C-47s throughout Europe. His plane wasn't a fighter plane. It wasn't armed with heavy guns, it couldn't drop bombs. Its only purpose was to carry supplies. Harry Beard would fly ahead of General Patton's army and drop the supplies they needed: food, ammunition, and gear. Harry wasn't fighting on the front lines, but he went ahead of the soldiers and delivered what was necessary for the Americans to win the war. You've never heard of Harry Beard, but without people like him going ahead of the army and dropping off supplies, we would never have won that war. The same is true in the kingdom of heaven. We are at war and people's souls are on the line. The heart of the next generation is on the line. We need people with generous hearts who will sacrificially give today, so that those who come behind them will have all they need tomorrow.

I want to wrap up with one more story. Last week we talked about King David, and how he was offered the opportunity to have a discounted worship. The land, the wood, the cattle for the sacrifice were all given to him, but he refused. He said, "I am not going to offer the Lord a sacrifice that costs me nothing." I want to compare him to the King who came before him, who God removed from the throne. Saul was

asked, after a victory in battle, to sacrifice all the animals. God was the one who gave him the victory, so Saul was supposed to offer all the animals as a sacrifice. But Saul refused. He sacrificed all the weak, injured, lame animals, but kept all the good ones. The prophet Samuel showed up and Saul said, “I did everything God asked.” Samuel looked at him and said, “Then why do I hear cattle and sheep?” He looked at him directly and said, “Why did you not obey the Lord? Why did you pounce on the plunder and do evil in the eyes of the Lord?” (1 Samuel 15:19). Because he refused to give God what God deserved, he lost the kingdom. In his place, God raised up David, a man after God’s own heart. How did David he was a man after God’s own heart? He gave all he had to build the temple. 1Chronicles 29 tells us “For the building of the temple, King David donated: 3,750 tons of gold, 37,500 tons of silver, more bronze and iron than anyone could weigh, precious stones, all the necessary wood and stone.” In modern terms, he gave over 300 billion dollars to construct the temple. He not only wanted his lasting witness to be his heart of worship for God, but he also wanted others to be able to come and worship God as well. That’s why he is called a man after God’s own heart.

When it comes to giving, we know God wants us to worship him when it comes to generosity. But we want more than just personal worship—we want our generosity to help others worship, too, and to accomplish the witness of Jesus Christ in the lives of countless others!