

**Sermon – Radical Generosity (Part 2)**  
**Sunday November 20, 2022**

What's the secret to a deeply satisfying life?

Researchers looked into this and found one quality that's directly related to how satisfied people are with their lives. People who have it:

- Have higher self-esteem
- More friends
- Healthier relationships
- And better health.

Dr. Karl Menninger, founder of the Menninger clinic said that people who have this quality are rarely mentally ill.

So what is this quality?

Generosity. Generous people live lives that are more meaningful and satisfying.

In another research study, 50 people were given \$100. Half the people were told to spend it on themselves while the other half were told to give it away.

According to the brain scans they did, one group showed significantly greater levels of happiness. Any guesses which group it was? The people who gave their money away.

Not only did the MRI scans show more activity in the part of the brain associated with happiness, but after the experiment ended, the people who gave reported higher levels of happiness over time.

But this shouldn't come as a surprise. Generosity is widely acknowledged as a timeless principle.

One ancient Chinese proverb says, *If you want happiness for an hour, take a nap. If you want happiness for a day, go fishing. If you want happiness for a year, inherit a fortune. If you want happiness for a lifetime, be generous.*

Muhammad Yunus, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize said, *Making money is a happiness; making other people happy with your money is a superhappiness.*

And Winston Churchill, the great British Prime Minister, once said: *We make a living by what we get; we make a life by what we give.*

But 2000 years ago, Jesus said it before anyone else. In Acts 20:35, he said: *It is more blessed to give than to receive.*

So what's the secret to a deeply satisfying life? Radical generosity.

We're in a series called *Marks of a Thriving Church*. We've been looking at how the early church was devoted to Jesus, to one another as well as to several core practices that helped them grow deeper in their faith.

Each week we've been looking at one of these practices. Today we're wrapping up our series by looking at the final practice: Radical Generosity.

Let's start by reading the passage we've been using for this series.

**42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)**

Today we're going to talk about Radical Generosity. What I want to do is talk about:

1. Why we should be generous.
2. What keeps us from being generous.
3. What motivates us to be generous.

First, **Why should we be generous?**

I think it's easy to see two categories of people – those who are generous and those who aren't.

But here's the thing. All of us are called to be generous.

How do I know that? I know that because you and I are created to love. I don't think anyone would disagree.

**Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>38</sup> This is the first and greatest commandment. <sup>39</sup> And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself."<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>40</sup> All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:36-40)**

You and I were created to live for more than just ourselves. We were created to love – to bless, to serve, to meet the needs of others. And **Giving is simply the highest expression of love.**

Think about it. You can give without love, but you can't love without giving.

Do you know the best example of this?

**For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son... (John 3:16)**

Love isn't just a sentimental feeling. Love compels us to give for the sake of others - even the things that are most precious.

We were created in the image of God. A God whose love compelled him to give. So you and I are created to love. We're created to be generous. To give what we have for the sake of others.

God uses our generosity to build his kingdom. Because generosity helps meet the needs of others.

The early church was known for this. In Acts 4 we see that:

**No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had... And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all <sup>34</sup> that there were no needy persons among them. (Acts 4:32-34)**

God also uses the generosity of his people to support the work of the local church. This happens through our tithes and offerings.

**Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. (Malachi 3:10)**

In the Old Testament, the storehouse was located next to the temple. It's where people brought their tithes to support God's work.

What is the tithe?

The tithe comes from the Hebrew word meaning *one-tenth*. When God blesses us, we bring him a tenth of that as our tithe. Tithing is bringing 10 percent of your income to God through the local church. This has been the biblical benchmark for Christians to give. It's a goal to move towards and even go beyond.

What is the tithe used for?

The tithe is used to provide for the work of God's church. It funds the church's ministries. It enables the church to live out its mission.

Now when it comes to tithing, how well do you think Christians are doing with that? According to statistics:

- Only 5 percent of Christians tithe
- 80 percent of Christians give less than 2 percent of their income.
- And on average, Christians give about 2.5 percent of their income.

Just to put this in context, during the Great Depression, Christians were giving 3.3 percent of their income. In other words, even though Christians during the Great Depression had less money and more adversity, they gave at a higher percentage than we give today. That's just not right!

Imagine what could happen if Christians simply tithed. According to experts, if that were to happen:

- Global hunger and death from preventable diseases would be eliminated within five years.
- Clean drinking water would be available to every single person.
- Illiteracy would be eliminated
- All overseas missions work would be fully funded
- And after all this there will still be over \$100 billion left.

**So What keeps us from being generous?**

We all want to be generous. We all think we're generous. But according to statistics, we're not as generous as we think. So what keeps us from being as generous as we want to be?

Now for those of you who don't know, before becoming a pastor, I was a chartered account. Technically I still am. I got my Masters in accounting from the University of Waterloo and have been a CPA for 24 years. So I think I'm qualified to give this expert accounting opinion. Here it is – are you ready?

When you give, you have less. (Profound isn't it?)

When you give, you have less. Less to buy food, less to buy the newest phone, less to spend on your vacation.

So the reason I'm not more generous is because if I give, I'll have less. And I just don't have enough right now. I have bills to pay, school to save up for, and housing prices in Toronto are so crazy!

But if I had more money, I would give. If I had more money, I would be generous.

But is that really true?

According to statistics, people who make more money actually give a lower percentage of their money away. Do you know why?

Because it's not about the money. It's about what money represents.

As a child of immigrant parents, money represented security. Having money in your savings meant that you'd be okay if something happened.

For some people, money represents status. You can buy big houses, expensive cars and fancy name brands to prove to people that you've made it.

For others, money represents power. Now that I have money, I can do what I want, I can live the way I want. Nothing can stop me.

Who knew that money could have such a power over us? Jesus did.

That's why he talked more about money than any other topic. One third of his parables are about money. In the New Testament, there are 500 verses on prayer and less than 500 verses on faith. And guess how many verses there are on money? 2350.

God is extremely interested in how you handle your money. Why? It's not because he needs it. It all belongs to him anyway. But it's because he knows that **What you do with your money is an indication of your heart.**

Jesus said it like this: **For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:21)**

You see, money, like nothing else, has a way of stealing your heart, robbing you of joy, depriving you of faith.

That's why Jesus said: **No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money. (Matthew 6:24)**

Money is almost always the last thing we surrender to God. Take a look at the screen.

[Show Comic Strip from this URL <https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2004/may-online-only/baptize-everything-but-wallet.html>]

What do you see in this comic panel? A man who's getting baptized. He's decided to give his life to Jesus. But there's only one problem: he can't let go of his wallet. He's still clutching it.

Isn't that a picture of you and me?

We're willing to grow in prayer, join a group, serve the community and read the Bible. But when it comes to giving – that's too personal! Don't go there.

What is that about? How might God be speaking to you when it comes to your money? How might God be inviting you to surrender to him.

You see, what you do with your money is an indication of your heart.

Last week, Pastor Andrew shared a quote from Martin Luther who said people have three conversions. A conversion of their head, their heart and their purse – and out of all three, the purse is always the hardest.

But here's the irony. We think life will be better if we manage our money ourselves. But that's not true. It's actually because we haven't surrendered control of our money that our lives are out of control. How do we see this?

**We live in constant fear.** We're always worried and afraid that we won't have enough.

King Solomon said: **Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income. (Eccl 5:10)**

**We're unhappy.** A London School of Economics study compared our lifestyles now to the lifestyle of those living in the 1950s. In every category we have more: more food, more clothes, more cars, bigger houses, better health.

But do you know the only thing we don't have more of? Happiness. Despite having more, we're a lot less happy than we were in the past.

**We argue more.** A recent surveyed looked at the most common reason couples argue. Any guesses what the number one thing couples fight about most? Money.

Money is the number one reason couples argue. Nearly 62% of people who say they argue with their partner fight about money.

You see, God has designed the world so that the more you give, the more you're blessed. That's why Jesus said, it's better to give than to receive. So when you don't give and you keep it for yourself, you miss out on the life God wants to give you.

I love how American writer and theologian Frederick Buechner puts it: **The life you clutch, hoard, guard and play safe with is in the end a life worth little to anybody, including yourself. Only a life given away for love's sake is a life worth living. (Frederick Buechner)**

So how do you break free from your greed and fear? **What motivates true generosity?**

Guilt doesn't work. It might make you give reluctantly but it can't make you generous.

Appealing to a better life doesn't work. Because you're still giving out of self-interest and that's hardly being generous.

So what motivates truly generous people to give?

About seven years ago when Cornerstone Centre first opened, people were blown away by this amazing facility. They loved our beautiful gym, our huge windows, our spacious café and our multi-purpose rooms.

At the time, most people assumed this community centre was built by the Town of Markham. Because there's no way it could be privately funded. In fact, our own consultants told us the same thing. A church your size can't possibly raise the money to build a multi-million-dollar facility like this.

But what they didn't count on was what God can do when his people are moved to generosity. During that time, people made huge sacrifices. They gave over and above their regular tithes towards the construction of this building.

Now, why would hundreds of people give thousands, tens of thousands of dollars above their regular tithes?

They were thinking about a time when they had no hope. When they were hurting, broken and afraid. When they had no purpose. When they were alone.

But then they met Jesus. And he gave them hope. He took away their shame. He gave them a new identity and a new purpose. He changed their hearts and gave them power to live the lives they were meant to live.

He gave them this church where they could worship together, do life together and serve the greater community together.

Why did people give so generously? They did it out of gratitude for all that Jesus had done. They gave up vacations, renovation plans, major purchases. They downsized, dipped into their savings and changed their spending habits. And not only did they give generously, they gave joyfully.

They gave because the love of God had changed them. They gave because they wanted people who didn't know God to experience his love.

**True generosity is a response to God's love.** It's motivated by our gratitude for what God has done. It's motivated by our desire for others to experience God's love.

This is one of our core values. **We're called to be extravagantly generous because God has been extravagantly generous to us in Jesus.**

So how do you become generous. You think about Jesus. You think about what he did for you on the cross. You think about how he suffered for you. You think about how he died for you. You think about how he gave everything for you. Then you let that change your heart.

**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)**

True generosity is a response to God's love.

It's why we raised millions of dollars to build Cornerstone Centre. Not so we could use it ourselves, but so that we could give as a gift to the community. It's why we serve our neighbours. It's why we have exciting ministry plans for the year ahead. It's why we exist as a church.

As we come to the end of this year, I want to share a brief financial update.

Currently, between the offering we've received and our year-to-date budget, there's a gap of \$184K.

In total, the amount we would need today to meet our 2022 budget is \$456K.

We believe meeting our budget is certainly achievable. We have a strong giving record at Cornerstone and a deep history of meeting our budget.

But we also want to remind you to give. Your giving will not only enable us to finish the year in the black, but it will put us in a good financial position to continue serving our community and pursuing the mission God has given us.

We have a budget to meet, but we don't give primarily to meet the budget. We give in response to what God has given us.

God has blessed this church so much. This is our opportunity to respond.

If you are new here and consider Cornerstone your church – whether you're a child, a young adult, a mature adult (like Pastor Andrew), or anything in between - this may be your opportunity to start giving here, perhaps for the first time and see how God will use your gift to bless others.

If you've been around for awhile and you've been giving, thank you for your gifts. Maybe you can ask God to see if he wants you to increase your giving or give a special year-end gift to the church.

If you haven't been giving, what's stopping you? God doesn't want your money, he wants your heart. But money is often the last thing we surrender. So ask God to help you surrender your heart to him so that he can heal you, bless you and use you to bless others.

As we do that together, we become a light for Jesus in our community. So that when people ask us, Why are you so generous? We can tell them, We worship a generous God who loved us so much that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Why do we give? We give because giving is the highest expression of love.

Why are we generous? We're generous because we worship a generous God who has given us everything we need in Jesus.

**Surplus giving is the leftover you can afford to give. Sacrificial giving is the love gift that changes how you live because the love of Christ has changed you. God doesn't want your leftovers. God wants your "first-overs" because He is your first love." (Ann Voskamp)**

Let's pray.