

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

February 26, 2017

Building Faith at Home Series - Stretched Thin: A Series on Time and Money

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Generous Giving

1 Chronicles 29:10-22, Luke 19:1-10

Introduction:

A. Nintendo illustration shows it's hard to give generously

Good morning friends. This morning we're wrapping up our Building Faith at Home series on time and money. So many homes feel *Stretched Thin* in these areas of life, so we've been looking to God's Word for help, inviting God to lead us in using our time and money in His life-giving ways.

For at Northwest we value generosity with our time and money. Generous living and giving is one of our core values because God cares about generosity. Christian authors have found that 15% of everything Jesus said relates to our money and possessions, which is more than Jesus' teachings on heaven and hell put together¹, and it's twenty times more than He talks about sex.² The leader of a social justice ministry searched not just Jesus' words, but the entire Bible on the subject. He found more than 2,000 texts about the poor, wealth and poverty, and social justice.³

Now one reason God's Word puts such an emphasis on our money and possessions is because there's a powerful connection between how we use them and our relationship with God. Jesus speaks about this in the Gospel of Matthew, saying, ¹⁹“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” And then a few verses later, ²⁴“No one can serve two masters, for 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 God and money.”

Now I don't know about you, but I struggle with an ungenerous spirit. The signs were already there back when I was five, when my parents bought me the original Nintendo

¹ Alcorn, Randy, *The Treasure Principle*, 9.

² Keller, Tim, from teaching I heard online some years ago from the 2005 Treasure and Justice Gathering.

³ Jim Wallis – Accessed online 2/22/17 at <https://sojo.net/articles/hole-y-bible-gets-digital-makeover>

Entertainment System for Christmas. It was *the* toy that year, and after excitedly opening it, I got my dad to hook it up.

Now my Mom views my childhood through rose colored glasses, so I prefer how she recalls the rest of the story. About how, after I played Super Mario Brothers all afternoon, she calls me in for Christmas dinner. And five-year-old Jeff protests, saying, “Mom, I’ve only been playing 10 minutes, I *need* one more game.” A nice little yearly Christmastime anecdote for all.

My Dad’s view of my childhood isn’t quite as rosy. He’s probably just forgotten how amazing of a kid I was :) So his version of the story adds an additional detail. That after I’ve been playing a couple of hours, he comes in to watch, to see what this Nintendo craze is all about. After watching, he asks for a turn. And at first, I tell him no. After all, Dad, you gave the Nintendo to this guy. Never mind that he spent multiple nights after work trying to find a store with one, or that he paid for it, or that he read the instructions and figured out how to hook it up for me, to his TV, in his house.

Dean, that’s my Dad’s name. Now Dean’s a nice guy, but in that moment Dean was not pleased with his offspring. His response was essentially, “Are you kidding me?” For my initial unwillingness to share showed my selfishness, that I didn’t appreciate all my parents had done in providing a Nintendo, and so many other good things.

Sadly, I can fall into the same pattern in my spiritual life, failing to appreciate all God has done and will do for me, living a selfish life despite spiritual and material abundance. Having lost sight of Jesus’ teaching that, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

B. What can help us give generously?

So today we’re asking the question, what can help us give generously? If you’ve got a Bible, I invite you to turn to the Old Testament book of 1 Chronicles, chapter 29 as we answer this question. 1 Chronicles chapter 29, where we’re going to see that to give generously, we need the right view of God, ourselves, “our” possessions, and joy. Before we hear from God’s Word, let’s pray now and ask God for help.

I. We need the right view

A. God is awesome provider

i. God is worthy of worship (1 Chron 29:10-13)

1 Chronicles Chapter 29 is during the reign of David, the second king of the Israelites, about 1,000 years before Jesus. For the most part David sought God’s ways, and God blessed his

reign, allowing the Israelites to settle in peace in the Promised Land. So David wanted to build God a permanent temple to take the place of the portable tabernacle. There in the temple, like the tabernacle before it, God's presence would dwell among His people in a special way.

However, God told David that He wanted David's son Solomon, the next king, to build the temple. So David just got everything ready for the temple's future construction. From his wealth, and the country's wealth, David set aside tons of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and precious stones. And David asked the people if they'd give as well, the people generously responding with many more supplies.

Now to give generously, like those Israelites, we need to share their view. And the first part of that view is to see God as awesome provider. Please follow along with me starting in verse 10, which makes this point by saying:

“¹⁰Therefore David blessed the LORD in the presence of all the assembly. And David said: “Blessed are you, O LORD, the God of Israel our father, forever and ever. ¹¹Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all. ¹²Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. ¹³And now we thank you, our God, and praise your glorious name.”

Look back at verse 11 with me. Notice how David describes God's awesomeness, using words like greatness and power and glory and victory and majesty. This is God we're talking about here, the awe-inspiring creator and owner of all.

Now look back at verse 12 with me. Here David describes God's provision to His people. That Almighty God is the giver of riches and honor, the one who makes us great and gives us strength. Everything good we have is from God. And so, having been oriented to view God as awesome provider, verse 13 shows the right response, to thank God and praise His glorious name.

ii. Helping our homes avoid worshipping money

Now it's not always easy to stay focused on God's greatness. If we're not careful, our homes can focus too little on God and too much on our money and possessions.

To help avoid this, Christian professor and author James Smith says to think critically about if our habits are training us to consume too much. He uses the mall to illustrate his point.

When you arrive at the mall, no one hands you a statement of faith with ten things the mall believes about overconsumption. But that doesn't mean the mall is a neutral space. It just steers us toward its consumerism in a different way. It invites us to engage in its practices, forming us through sights and habit.

The typical indoor mall is an inviting space with high ceilings, like the cathedrals of old, a big place where you can forget about the distractions of the outside world. And as we walk around in it, we see lots of ads and pictures in front of the stores. Images of beauty, pleasure, community, and joy. Images that whisper, "This isn't you, your life doesn't compare, but if you buy this, you'll taste more of this good life." It can be fun to buy something new, but when we're back in the real world we'll soon realize that our shopping therapy didn't deliver long term happiness or really fix our flaws.

Additionally, the mall invites us to consider it a communal place as we have fun shopping together. Well, at least some of us. I don't enjoy malls that much, but I get that some do. But unfortunately the mall's values work against the kind of community we need. For the more we are shaped by the mall's ideal of having the right image, the more we judge not only ourselves, but others, by that standard. And so our relationships become more competitive, each one an opportunity to congratulate yourself, or feel discouraged, as you measure if you're the more stylish or successful one. Further, the more we embrace the mall's ideal that life is found in buying more and more, the more we hinder global community. For the only way we can keep buying more and more at affordable prices is if others keep working too many hours for too little pay.

Now I'm not saying we must boycott the mall. One day you may even see me there, probably because my wife made me go 😊 But I am saying it is important for us be aware how our habits can shape us in ways that take our focus off God and put it on stuff.

And if your home has kids, it's important to help them begin to critically view these things too. To have conversations about what the Bud Light commercial is promising and if it can really deliver on that promise. Or about how the mall wants to shape them as consumers. James Smith said a happy parenting day for him was when his teenage son asked him for a ride to the mall by saying, "Dad, can you drive me to the temple?" Through their conversations, his

son was staring to understand how our habits shape if our worship is directed towards our stuff or God.⁴

We want to see our kids develop godly perspective and habits when it comes to money. To have good conversations about it, and model good stewardship, so our kids see God is worthy of worship in all areas. And that preparation should include allowing kids opportunities to steward money. To give one example, a parent shared with me that they let their kids make all the decisions for their back to school clothes. The parents give a set amount of money and drive them around to whatever stores the kids want, where the kids decide what they're going to buy. And so the kids get a sense of how expensive things are, and if they make some foolish purchases and blow their budget, no big deal. After all, it's much better to experience the consequences of poor stewardship when the stakes are low.

B. We are blessed stewards

i. God graciously gives us all (1 Chron 29:14-16)

We all have opportunities to steward money, and if we're going steward it generously, the second thing to see is that we're blessed stewards. Please follow along as I read, starting in verse 14, where David says to God's people:

¹⁴“But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you. ¹⁵For we are strangers before you and sojourners, as all our fathers were. Our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no abiding. ¹⁶O LORD our God, all this abundance that we have provided for building you a house for your holy name comes from your hand and is all your own.”

Back in verses 10-13, David invited us to see God rightly, as our awesome provider. Here in verses 14-16 he now puts us and “our” stuff in perspective. He reminds us that we're nothing in comparison to God. As verse 15 says it, our days are just a shadow, here today and gone tomorrow. Verses 14 and 16 remind us that all we possess we have only because God gave it to us. It's all really His anyway, we're just stewards of it.

And as we see how awesome our providing God is, and how blessed we are as stewards, it transforms our giving. We join David in humbly saying, “Who am I, and who are we, to give to Almighty God?” What a privilege, that God allows us to give to Him! Think of it.

ii. Zacchaeus' response as a blessed steward (Luke 19:1-10)

⁴ Smith, James K.A. *You Are What You Love*, 40-55.

It makes me think of the transformation that took place with Zacchaeus the Israelite tax collector. If you've got a Bible, I invite you to turn to Luke Chapter 19, where the account is found. As you're turning, I'll share about tax collectors. During the time of Jesus, the Romans ruled, and they taxed everyone they conquered, including the Israelites. To collect the tax, they got a few locals to serve as tax collectors. These tax collectors taxed at a very high rate, giving the Romans their share and growing rich on the rest. As long as the Romans got their part, they didn't care what the tax collectors did. And if anyone protested, the Romans brought in the military.

So the Israelites despised the tax collectors as traitors who greedily ripped off their countrymen. And Zacchaeus wasn't just a tax collector, he was the chief tax collector, so you can imagine how the people felt about him. Now please follow along as I read the story, starting in verse 1, which says:

“He entered Jericho and was passing through. ² And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. ³ And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. ⁴ So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way.”

Zacchaeus really wants to see Jesus. But he's too short to peer over the crowd, and no one's going to let that punk Zacchaeus in front of them, so he climbs a tree. In that culture grown men did not climb trees, it was undignified, so Zacchaeus must really want to see Jesus. Let's see how Jesus responds in verse 5.

⁵ And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.” ⁶ So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. ⁷ And when they saw it, they all grumbled, “He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.”

In that culture, eating and staying at someone's house affirmed closeness, which is why the crowd protests Jesus' action with this “sinner”. Can you imagine being Zacchaeus here? You're the outsider, a greedy traitor despised by all, the one in this crowd least worthy to be friends with Jesus. And yet Jesus extends the gracious hand of friendship to you, yes you. Having hurried down the tree joyfully, let's see what Zacchaeus says in verse 8.

⁸ And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.” ⁹ And Jesus said to

him, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

Zacchaeus surely knew Old Testament Law said to give 10%, and to pay an extra 20% if you defrauded someone. But in response to Jesus’ amazing grace, Zacchaeus is not thinking about a minimum or requirement. Rather, Zacchaeus, the greedy guy who gave up everything to become rich, is now excited to give away 50% and pay 400% to any he’s defrauded.

Notice the order here, it starts with Jesus’ grace. It’s not like Jesus said, “Well Zacchaeus, I’ll fellowship with you if you stop ripping others off.” Or, “Well Zacchaeus, I just extended the hand of friendship to you even though you’re completely unworthy, so don’t you need to do something with your money in response?”

No, Jesus gives grace. Zacchaeus may not yet have a well-formed theology, but he tasted Jesus’ grace. That he, the most unworthy one there, was receiving amazing acceptance apart from performance. And Zacchaeus responds to this amazing grace with unprompted generosity.

In verse 8 Zacchaeus excitedly responds, “Behold, Lord.” I imagine Zacchaeus saying “Behold Lord!” the way my 5 and 3 year olds excitedly say, “Look Daddy!” when they’re excited to share something with me. Pastor JD Greear describes Zacchaeus, that, “He’s bubbling over with giddy generosity... tipsy on giving... not giving away money because he has to – he’s giving away money because he wants to.”⁵ And in the process Zacchaeus brings joy to Himself and His Savior, which will soon spread to the poor as they receive half of Zacchaeus’ wealth.

C. We can bring joy

i. Joy to God, ourselves, and others (1 Chron 29:17-22)

And that’s the third thing to see to give generously, that we can bring joy. Turn back with me to 1 Chronicles chapter 29. There we’ll see how our giving can bring joy to ourselves, others, and even God. I once heard another pastor describe this opportunity for joy by saying, “It’s a wonderful thing when grace and money get together.” Please follow along as I read in 1 Chronicles 29, starting in verse 17. Here King David says:

¹⁷ I know, my God, that you test the heart and have pleasure in uprightness. In the uprightness of my heart I have freely offered all these things, and now I have seen your people, who are present here, offering freely and joyously to you. ¹⁸ O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our fathers, keep forever such purposes and thoughts in the hearts of your people, and

⁵ Greear JD, *Gospel: Recovering the Power That Made Christianity Revolutionary*, 61-62.

direct their hearts toward you. ¹⁹ Grant to Solomon my son a whole heart that he may keep your commandments, your testimonies, and your statutes, performing all, and that he may build the palace for which I have made provision.” ²⁰ Then David said to all the assembly, “Bless the LORD your God.” And all the assembly blessed the LORD, the God of their fathers, and bowed their heads and paid homage to the LORD and to the king. ²¹ And they offered sacrifices to the LORD, and on the next day offered burnt offerings to the LORD, 1,000 bulls, 1,000 rams, and 1,000 lambs, with their drink offerings, and sacrifices in abundance for all Israel. ²² And they ate and drank before the LORD on that day with great gladness.

Look back at verse 17, notice the pleasure God has in an upright heart. Think of it, we can please God when we give freely and joyously to Him. And look how our passage ends. Having given generously to God in worship, God’s people feast together with great gladness. Their giving leading to personal and community joy.

I often forget what I’m missing out on when I’m not generous. For when we give money, it’s easy to see what we’re giving up, how we could have used that money on ourselves. In contrast, we don’t always immediately experience the benefits of giving, but those opportunities to bring joy to ourselves, other people, and God are all around us when we step into them by faith. The Israelites experienced that joy here, their generosity knitting their hearts together with each other and with God. Jesus describes this reality in His brief but profound statement, “Where you treasure is, there your heart is also.”

ii. Your generosity displays the joy of giving

And I’m so thankful our church family has invested its earthly treasure in God’s kingdom. Your generosity allowing us together to support local and overseas missionaries and mission trips, to evangelize and disciple children and youth each week and through special events like Vacation Bible School and Challenge, to have space to host blood drives, to provide small groups where prayer, discipleship, and spiritual friendship occur, to share our facilities with the community, to invite people to hear the gospel and worship Jesus in our services, to give 100 bags of groceries each month and provide space for Meals on Wheels to distribute even more food, to bring each other meals and other forms of assistance during times of hardship, to build relationships with and bless ESL students, to provide a place for you to use your gifts to evangelize and disciple in the church and community, to provide for families through Project Angel Tree and Operation Christmas Child, to offer free pastoral counseling, to cover bus passes

and utility bills in Jesus' name, to reach Spanish speakers with the love of Jesus through Encuentro. Just to name a few. And that's not even counting the many kingdom ministries outside of Northwest you generously support as well, from crisis pregnancy centers, to missionaries sharing God's love abroad, to children in need, and on and on it goes.

And your giving also gives us the privilege of serving people experiencing homelessness through our Bread & Water ministry. People like Elizabeth Burns, who before her passing was part of our church family. Some of you attended her memorial service here a couple months ago.

If you don't know her story, Elizabeth had been living on the streets for a decade when some folks from Northwest began bringing her and other people sandwiches and water. It's why the ministry is called Bread and Water. And week after week, our church family kept coming back to that homeless encampment in love.

At her funeral, a man in that homeless encampment at the time, Big John, shared with everyone. Some of you know Big John; he also met Jesus and got off the streets with the help of Bread & Water and has joined us for worship. He talked about those days that he and Elizabeth spent in the homeless encampment, saying, "These people from Northwest kept coming week after week, bringing sandwiches and telling us that God loved us and hadn't given up on us."

Like Big John, Elizabeth met Jesus, and with the help of Bread & Water, got off the streets. She got sober, giving God all the praise for her sobriety. She used to like to tell Pastor Dave and I how long she'd been sober, it started in months and then was counted in years. She got baptized and became a member of our church and grew spiritually in a small group, and gave testimony of how God changed her life at a Good Friday service. She even joined the Bread & Water team, ministering to other people as she had been ministered to.

At Elizabeth's funeral, I was asked last minute to run the sound and PowerPoint, which I'd never done before. I think I did okay, no one ever looked back at me during the singing or picture slideshow with that look of "what's that sound guy doing?". And as I sat back in the sound booth, I felt a part of things while at the same time also like an outside observer.

I grieved the loss of my sister Elizabeth, and rejoiced as I thought about the joy this scene must be bringing Jesus. Elizabeth, like all of us, had her flaws, but her life was powerfully transformed by Jesus. And now she's with Jesus, eternally joyful, because of the ways God used this church in her life.

At her funeral, I'm observing this scene where the homeless community and the middle class and people of a variety of races are together. And I don't mean sitting on opposite sides of the worship center politely avoiding each other. I mean together, crying together, sharing stories of Elizabeth together, singing songs of worship together, thanking Jesus that Elizabeth was in His presence and that we would join her there one day. And as I watched, I couldn't help but think that the scene brought Jesus joy. That maybe Jesus even said to Elizabeth, as they watched her memorial service together, "This is what I want my church doing."

And it wouldn't have happened without your generous giving. Giving your time, reaching into a hard place over and over with bread, water, and the hope of Jesus. And by the way, that work continues to this day. Talk with James Stopher, our drummer, if you'd like to get involved. And giving your money, money that allows us to buy sandwiches and get people needed medical attention and even help a few off the streets for good, not to mention have a building where a funeral can be held and a pastor to lead it. Your giving makes Bread & Water, and so many other ministries possible; and we all share in the inheritance of what God is doing here. So let's keep the generosity up, for who knows what stories of transformation God may bring as we keep building on this foundation of grace-based giving.

Conclusion:

A. To give generously we need the right view of God, ourselves, "our" stuff, and joy

This morning we've seen that to give generously we need the right view of God, ourselves, "our" stuff, and joy. And when we have the right view, we see that God is our awesome provider, that we are blessed stewards, and that we can bring joy, to God, ourselves, and others.

B. Let's give for Jesus

So let's stay focused on these amazing realities, day by day in prayer and Bible reading and community and service and giving, as we invite God to make them alive in our hearts. For like Zacchaeus, we were bankrupt in our sins, deserving eternal judgment. But then Jesus came with grace. Like with Zacchaeus, Jesus called us down from the tree, and then climbed up and took our place on it on the cross. As God's Word says, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."

Jesus treasured us enough to take our eternal bankruptcy and replace it with His spiritual riches. As God's Word says, "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 by his poverty might become rich."

Do you, like Zacchaeus, understand what He has done for you? As King David said it, "Who am I, and who are we, to be permitted to give to this Almighty God?" Let's pray...

Dismissal – You are dismissed. Go in peace to generously love and serve the Lord.