

Generosity: The “More Blessed” Way
Matthew 6:19-21, 1 Timothy 6:17-19
Northwest Community Church, Todd Havekost, 6/4/2023

Introduction

Today is the sixth and last sermon in our series of "time-tested truths for our times," highlighting several values that are near and dear to what we believe and how we live at Northwest. Let's begin with some audience participation to review those first five sermons, not only to remind ourselves of the subjects, but more importantly to reinforce our living out these "time-tested truths."

Sermons in the series:

1. The Bible - our lives and our frame of reference for truth are anchored on the Bible, not the prevailing winds of our culture; we will lovingly, wisely, and confidently advocate for God's truth.
2. Relating - genuine ("masks off") relating, and seeking connection with others with intentionality, especially with those who are different than me, which in our multi-ethnic context in northwest San Antonio will have a multi-ethnic expression.
3. Prayer - calling on God through prayer as He produces impact disproportionate to size through our relatively small church, and the confidence we can have that God will answer our prayers when we pray in Jesus' name, according to His will.
4. Unleashed - we are all on mission for ministry and are all "unleashed" to serve Jesus in the ways He puts on our hearts.
5. Evangelism - sharing the love and good news of Jesus with our friends, and recognizing that in today's culture lovingly meeting needs in Jesus' name can open doors and gain a hearing for that good news.
6. Generosity - today we will see how Scripture points us toward the "more blessed" way of generosity.¹

As we prepare to look into our primary passage in Matthew 6 let's orient ourselves to that context. Matthew (along with Mark and Luke, called the Synoptic gospels as Dave indicated last week) have similar primary purposes, to validate Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the promised Messiah of the Old Testament (OT), and to call readers to live as faithful followers of Jesus.²

Each of these three authors highlight their own themes. In Matthew's case he selected content that would especially resonate with Jewish readers and anyone steeped in the OT.³

Matthew chapters 5 through 7 contain the famous Sermon on the Mount. At a time when the Pharisees were widely regarded as the role models for righteousness, Jesus presented a sharply contrasting view of the way to blessedness and a life pleasing to God.

We saw last fall in the first 18 verses of chapter 6 that Jesus taught us to live for God's reward as we do good works like giving, praying, and fasting, seeking to please God alone (the Audience of One) instead of trying to impress other people. We will pick up at verse 19 which expands on those themes of giving and reward.

¹ See the Appendix for a pastor's true story illustrating the uncertainty of earthly riches and the "more blessed" way of generosity.

² In contrast the stated evangelistic purpose of the Gospel of John (in John 20:31), as Dave clearly explained last Sunday.

³ "Matthew selected the sermons, parables, teachings, prophesies, miracles, as well as aspects associated with the betrayal, trial, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus, that best represented his purpose of documenting the Messianic credentials of Jesus to his Jewish audience" (Don Trest, "The Distinctive Sonship Soteriology of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel", p. 59).

Matthew 6:19

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. (6:19).

Verses 19 and 20 start out with both the verb and the noun forms of the word "treasure", lit. "treasure your treasures." Let's see how this word "treasure" is used in the Bible as a verb and as a noun.

We find this verb "treasured" used of Mary in Luke 2. Immediately following Jesus' birth, after hearing the shepherds report both the angel's announcement "**today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord**" (Luke 2:11) as well as their account of the accompanying heavenly light show of angels singing God's glories, we read "**Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart**" (Luke 2:19). She deeply valued the words and witness of the angels, she held them near and dear, a prized possession in the moment that I imagine she called to mind again over and over throughout her life.⁴

That was the verb, in Matthew 13 we find Jesus using the noun "treasure" in a parable. "**The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field**" (Matt. 13:44). The noun "treasure" refers to something of great value, so much so that the man in the parable sells all that he owns to obtain it.

No surprises here, "treasure" means just what we understand from the English verb and noun. The verb: to regard or treat as precious. The noun: something of great value. The combination of both verb and noun forms together at the beginning of both of these verses is emphatic, "treasure your treasures."

Notice that Jesus doesn't say "don't treasure your treasures." He takes as a given that we will hold near and dear those things we deeply value. Instead, the focus of His exhortation is where we "treasure our treasures." There is a wrong place and a right place to store up our treasures.

First the wrong place. In verse 19 Jesus says don't "treasure your treasures" on earth. Why not make the accumulation of earthly possessions a primary pursuit of our lives? Because moths destroy fabric, rust corrodes metal, and thieves can steal anything. Jesus could have gone on: fires consume, floods wash away, governments seize, investments fail ... we get the picture. No earthly treasure is safe, all kinds of things happen to take things away from us or cause them to lose their value.⁵

Jesus' focus here in Matthew 6 is on the futility of seeking to retain earthly treasures while we live. Luke captures in chapters 11 and 12 many of Jesus' same teachings that we find in Matthew 6 and 7. There as part of His warnings against misplaced confidence in earthly possessions, Jesus told what is commonly termed "the parable of the rich fool."⁶

⁴ Mary is one of my absolute heroes in the Bible. An angel comes to her as a teenage girl and tells her "God has an incredibly special mission for you, to be the mother of Jesus." With that word came the immediately realization that embracing this mission would "blow up" every aspect of the rest of her life from how she always imagined it. For starters it would bring the stigma of being an unwed mother in a society where that had devastating implications for the rest of a woman's life, likely disqualifying her from every being married and thus consigning her to life-long poverty without the means to provide for herself.

How did Mary respond? "This is really going to mess up my plans, I need some time to think this over"? No, in the moment she responds "**Behold, the bondslave of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word**" (Luke 1:38). I aspire to follow in Mary's footsteps, to be as faithful to carry out the good works God has prepared for me as Mary was to God's mission for her. (Thankfully Joseph also responded in faith to his mission delivered by the angel and remained committed to their marriage, but at the time Mary responded in faith she had no way of knowing that good outcome would come to pass.)

⁵ Randy Alcorn, Giving is the Good Life, p. 203.

⁶ Jesus prefaced the parable with the stern warning "**Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions**" (Luke 12:15).

It is the story of a rich man who had harvested such a bountiful crop that he had run out of storage space in his barns. So far so good, at this point in the story as listeners we think "what an amazing opportunity he has before him to capitalize on this newfound abundance to give generously!"

But alas, at this pivotal moment, instead the man charts the foolish course of determining to build larger barns and telling himself **"You have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry"** (Luke 12:19).⁷

"But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?'" (12:20). And as Jesus concludes the parable we can hear the profound sadness in His assessment, **"So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God"** (12:21). Here is our "treasure" word again, here "treasuring for himself" represents the same folly as "storing up treasure on earth" from Matt. 6:19.

We should know with 100% certainty earthly treasures will be lost, either by "moth, rust and thieves" while we live (as Jesus said in Matt. 6:19), or they will be left behind when we die (per Jesus' story here in Luke 12). Jesus didn't describe the man as evil, but as a fool. Because he was oblivious to the fact that you can't take it with you and neglected his God-given opportunity through generosity to send it on ahead.

A life that "treasures" the possessions of this life, that holds them as most dear and valued, that places its confidence in them, will result in the sad outcome and assessment of being "not rich toward God."

Verse 20 points us to a better way ...

Matthew 6:20

But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal (6:20).

Jesus' message in these two verses is "stop storing up your treasures in the wrong place, but instead start storing up your treasures in the right place." Verse 19 said earth was the wrong place. Here we see "store up your treasures in heaven" is the right place.

Why? Because treasure stored in heaven is safe and secure, its value can't be lost or stolen. And it produces an indestructible, eternal return, not impacted by moth or rust.⁸

The Bible frequently helps us understand spiritual realities we can't see by explaining them in terms of commonly understood concepts we can see. In 2 Cor. 9 Paul utilized sowing and reaping to help us understand God's perspective on generosity. Here Jesus uses the word picture of giving as investing. It isn't parting with wealth, it is transferring it to a secure location. Jesus doesn't tell us to renounce our earthly treasures, He tells us instead to relocate them, to invest them in the First Bank of Heaven, where they represent the most profitable investment with the most enduring value we could ever imagine.⁹

⁷ He might be considered the forerunner of today's popular Financial Independence Retire Early (FIRE) movement.

⁸ Luke makes the connection between storing up treasure in heaven and generosity explicit as he captures Jesus' teaching again in chapter 12. **"Sell your possessions and give to charity** [lit. alms, give to the poor]; **make yourselves money belts which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near nor moth destroys"** (12:33) Here generosity toward God is expressed by meeting the needs of others in Jesus' name, as was also the case in Jesus' teaching earlier in Matthew 6 (beginning in verse 2).

⁹ Alcorn, p. 203.

People storing up treasures on earth ask the question "How much do we have to give?" For those storing up treasures in heaven, that question gets turned on its head and becomes, "How much do I really need to keep?"¹⁰

When we give generously of our material resources toward God's kingdom work, God graciously rewards our generosity in the form of indestructible, eternally valuable treasure. Beyond that, how that "treasure" exactly works, Jesus chooses not to get into.¹¹ But what is crystal clear are the alternatives: treasuring up treasure on earth vs. in heaven; and storing up treasure for ourselves vs. being rich toward God.

Matthew 6:21

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (6:21).

The "heart" in Scripture commonly refers to the core of who we are as a person. Prov 4:23 says "**Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.**"

Matthew 6:21 tells us the reason our view of our finances is not a minor, compartmentalized aspect of life. That is because my heart follows my treasure.

Generously investing in God's work leads me into greater devotion to God. When we relocate our treasures from earth to heaven, our hearts follow. Giving causes our long-term vested interests to shift from the "kingdom of me" to God's eternal kingdom. Giving is not merely a spiritual thermometer that indicates our heart's condition (though it does that). It is much more, a spiritual thermostat that has the power to change our heart's condition.¹²

These principles also apply to generosity with our other finite resources. Investing time and energies in God's service inevitably enlarges our hearts. It brings greater fulfillment and capacity to serve Him.¹³

This choice between treasuring temporal things or eternal things is just one application of a recurring "fork in the road" we face repeatedly. Will we live based on what we experience in the material world around us? Or will we live in light of God's eternal truths, His values, His perspectives, the unseen reality that can only be perceived through eyes of faith?

Living with this eternal perspective is a repeated theme throughout the New Testament (NT).

- Col. 3:2 describes this approach to life: **Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.**
- 2 Cor. 4:18 says it this way: **While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.**
- And 2 Cor. 5:7 pulls this all together in the concise expression "**we walk by faith not by sight.**"

¹⁰ Adapted from John Cortines and Gregory Baumer, God and Money: How We Discovered True Riches at Harvard Business School.

¹¹ Jesus (and NT authors) teaches repeatedly that we are to live for His reward as a primary motivator, but say little about the specifics of those rewards, perhaps because we don't have the frame of reference to understand now anyway. But we can and should take Him at His word He tells us they are very much worth living for and we will be incredibly glad we did.

¹² Alcorn, pp. 197-8.

¹³ One might be tempted to think "if I give generously, I will have to worry about where the money will come from to replace what is given." This extended Matthew 6 passage says the opposite. Anyone who is (a) investing in the right treasury (vs. 19-21), (b) adopting the right perspective (vs. 22-23), and (c) serving the right master (v. 24) has nothing to worry about, as Jesus emphasizes with his three "don't worry" statements in vs. 25-34. Generous giving isn't a cause for insecurity and worry. It's a cure for it (Alcorn, pp. 243-4).

In addition to living generously, we live with an eternal perspective ...

- When we get our truth from the Bible instead of the prevailing views of culture or what seems right to us;
- When we enter into genuine relating with people different than us, trusting that God works powerfully through loving community;
- When we call on God to do through prayer far beyond what we can accomplish on our own;
- When we live as those on mission for ministry and devote our time and energies to carry out the ministries Jesus puts on our hearts;
- When we lovingly meet needs in Jesus' name as we ask God to open doors to share the good news of Jesus;
- And finally, when our overriding philosophy of life and death is **"to live is Christ and to die is gain"** (Phil. 1:21).

1 Timothy 6:17-19

Let's look at a passage in 1 Timothy 6 that also talks about treasure and many of these same concepts and take it phrase by phrase.

Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed (6:17-19).

The intended audience of this **"instruct[ion is] those who are rich in this present world."** If we evaluate being "rich" within the context of the United States, perhaps few of us would self-identify. But all of us who have had the opportunity to travel outside the developed world realize that we live in a "bubble of affluence" in this country. Expanding our frame of reference to include people from around the world leads to a very different perspective. A person with a full-time job at \$15 per hour has an income higher than 9 of 10 people throughout the world.¹⁴ So these exhortations are indeed intended for many of us.

"Not to be conceited" [about how much we have] – **"God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble"** (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5) is a recurring theme throughout Scripture. Along these same lines, Paul asked the proud Corinthians **"What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?"** (1 Cor. 4:7b)

"Or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches" – Echoes of Matt. 6:19 **"where moth and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal."**

"But [fix your hope] on God who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy" – Every good thing is to be enjoyed as a gracious gift from God (James 1:17) and part of God's good creation, we aren't anti-pleasure. But things are not worthy of becoming the place where we "fix our hope" and look for security and well-being.¹⁵

"Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works" – We will have profound regret if we miss the opportunity to translate being rich with material things into being "rich in good works" (here) or "rich toward God" (as Jesus put it in Luke 12).

¹⁴ According to givingwhatwecan.org; note some sources place this income even higher on the world wealth spectrum.

¹⁵ "The true good life doesn't say no to wealth or pleasures. Rather, it says yes to greater and lasting wealth and pleasures that are found when we cheerfully part with God's money and possessions for others' good and God's glory" (Alcorn, p. 21).

"To be generous and ready to share" – This is the core of our focus today, being generous, to live ready, seeking opportunities to share our possessions to bless others. I am thankful that Northwest has been “generous and ready to share” the God-provided riches of the Land Sale Proceeds, having invested several hundred thousand dollars to date to create world-wide impact through dozens of Christian ministries around the world.¹⁶

"Storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future" – Again here is that “treasure” verb we have been encountering all morning. Through generosity we store up future, eternal, “can never be lost” treasure in heaven (as we saw in Matt. 6:20).

"So that [a primary purpose of our generosity] you may take hold of [seize with tenacity¹⁷] that which is life indeed" – Other versions translate that last phrase take hold of “what is truly life” (NET2, Lexham, ESV, CEB).

As we picture this “life indeed” (Jesus called it “abundant life” in John 10), life in all its fulness, we can't help but be struck by the contrast with the pitiful existence described just a few verses earlier in this chapter.

But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs (1 Tim 6:9-10).

There are at least nine destructive consequences of money-love captured in just these two verses.¹⁸ What a stark contrast between that and experiencing rich fulness of life.¹⁹

My life was forever changed my freshman year in college when I read 1 John 5:13. **"These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life."** At that moment I went from having a nebulous and uncertain standing with God, both in the present and the future, to knowing that as one who believed in Jesus, I had eternal life.

“Eternal life” involves both duration and quality. When I first believed I was focused on duration, the wonderful assurance that based solely on Jesus' promise I had become a certain possessor of life that would never end and that would deliver me safely to heaven upon my death. My deep-seated fear of death was removed immediately.

But eternal life is not like a present you don't get to open until Christmas. It is not “life insurance” that only “pays off” when we die.

¹⁶ More than \$500,000 of LSP funds has been contributed to “outside” ministries to date, and a Kingdom Investment Initiative is currently underway to identify the next wave of ministry investments.

¹⁷ This word “take hold” is translated “seized” multiple times in Acts (16:19; 18:17; 21:30), it is an aggressive word suggesting that we vigorously, tenaciously seize hold of the true life (Alcorn., p. 234).

¹⁸ (1) Falling into temptation; (2) becoming ensnared in a trap; (3) succumbing to many foolish desires; (4) giving in to many harmful desires; (5) plunging us into ruin; (6) resulting in our destruction; (7) leading us into all kinds of evil; (8) causing us to wander from the faith; (9) piercing ourselves with many griefs (Alcorn, p. 115, NIV).

¹⁹ Randy Alcorn captures more of the devastating consequences of money-love in this paraphrase of Eccl. 5:10-15.

The more we have ...

- The more we want (v. 10a)
- The less we're satisfied (v. 10b)
- The more people (including the government) will come after it (v. 11a)
- The more we realize it does us no good (v. 11b)
- The more we have to worry about (v. 12)
- The more we can hurt ourselves by holding on to it (v. 13)
- The more we have to lose (v. 14)
- The more we will leave behind (v. 15) (Alcorn, pp. 132-3).

Everyone who has believed in Jesus has eternal life. We now have the opportunity to be fully alive in the ways and to the extent God intended when He created us. We can experience life indeed, full of joy and purpose and fulfillment, even in the face of adversity.

I have owned several lawn mowers over the course of my life. Some ran on a specified mixture of oil and gas; others were fueled solely by gasoline. I'm not very mechanically inclined, I could never tell just by looking which type of fuel was required, or when it was a mixture, how much oil to mix with the gas. Only when I read the manufacturer's guidance labeled on the mower and written in the owner's manual (provided by the people who designed and built the mower) did I know what type of fuel this mower was designed to run on and the conditions under which it would operate at its peak capacity.

The Bible is (among many other things) God's "owner's manual" where we learn the conditions under which He designed us to flourish. It teaches us (if we will listen) how we can experience the fullness of life He intended for us from the beginning.

We just saw in 1 Tim. 6 that generosity is a key aspect of experiencing "life indeed." Paul concluded his farewell address to the Elders of Ephesus Community Church recorded in Acts 20 by reminding them that Jesus said, "**It is more blessed to give than to receive**" (Acts 20:35b).

As He did in the Beatitudes, so again here, Jesus shared another page from God's "owner's manual" indicating He designed us to flourish fueled by generosity. Giving is the path to happiness, to joy, to "life indeed." Generosity is indeed the "more blessed" way.²⁰

Illustration

Let's see if you find this illustration helpful in "taking hold" of the concepts we've been considering today. Imagine some box game or video game in which you accumulate money or currency of some kind. For our purposes today we will use money from the board game "Monopoly" that was popular when I was young.

Now imagine you are in the early stages of playing that game when someone not participating in the game comes up to you and offers to exchange U.S. currency (cash) for the game money in your possession, dollar for dollar.

I expect almost every one of us would take that offer to turn Monopoly money into cash. We would say yes because what we could accomplish with that game money during that relatively brief game would be far less important to us than what we could buy with the cash after the game was over that would benefit us for at least months to come.

Let's discuss reasons we might accept that offer adapting language we have been using today.

- Don't "treasure" Monopoly money that you might lose when a bad roll of the dice lands you on someone's hotel and that will certainly be worthless to you when the game is over.
- Instead, consider of great value cash that you can turn into assets that will benefit you for far longer than the relatively brief duration of that game.
- Have as your primary focus ("set your mind on") the "big picture" realities of your life, not what is happening during the game.

²⁰ Sociology research corroborates that generosity causes people to flourish. Note this finding of a recent 5-year study that included surveys of more than 2000 adults. "Giving money, volunteering, being relationally generous, being a generous neighbor and friend, and personally valuing the importance of being a generous person are all significantly, positively correlated with greater personal happiness, physical health, a stronger sense of purpose in life, avoidance of symptoms of depression, and a greater interest in personal growth." Christian Smith and Hilary Davidson, The Paradox of Generosity: Giving We Receive, Grasping We Lose, cited by Alcorn, p. 8).

- The things you see on the game board only matter for the next hour or two, the things which are not seen on the board will affect your life for months to come.
- Make your decisions based on what you know to be true of your life (“walk by faith”), not by what you see on the game board (“not by sight”)

We have seen today that God puts before us an offer far more rewarding than this Monopoly game illustration.

- In exchange for the accumulation of material possessions during this relatively brief life on earth, possessions destined to lose value while we live, and that we cannot take with us when we die;
- He offers us instead the opportunity to generously invest those funds in God's kingdom work, resulting in rich blessedness of life today, and treasure in heaven for all eternity we can never lose.
- You can't take it with you, but God has given us the amazing opportunity to send it on ahead.

As a young adult God used the writings of Randy Alcorn to inspire in me a vision for storing up treasure in heaven. That vision has developed over the years into a purpose that has profoundly shaped my life and become one of my great privileges and blessings. It has opened the door to a decades-long partnership with a ministry to provide Bibles to persecuted Christians. And it has brought clarity to understanding that one aspect of my stewardship involves remaining in the workforce as long as God allows in order to sustain my capacity for investing in Christian ministries and storing up treasure in heaven.²¹

Conclusion: A True Story

We will conclude with a true story from the middle of the last century of a German businessman who lived in Poland who was always looking for new ways to make more money. With the rise of the Nazi war machine in the late 1930's he recognized his opportunity of a lifetime. He started a company to make cookware, using bribes to win military contracts. He shrewdly came up with the capital to start the factory by essentially confiscating assets of Jewish businessmen who were soon going to lose those assets outright to the Nazis anyway. The moment he learned that the Nazis would charge him less for Jewish slave labor than he would have to pay Polish workers, his staffing plan was determined.

This was an extremely profitable enterprise for him until 1942, when the Germans began shipping the Jews out of his city to labor (soon to be death) camps in other cities, depriving him of his factory workers.

When he realized that his factory was the only thing preventing his workers from being shipped away to the death camps, this man had a sudden awakening that led to a radical change in perspective. Instead of viewing the Jews as slave labor, he came to see them as individuals and families for whom he cared and who he wanted to rescue from death at the hands of the Nazis.

So he began leveraging his influence to get Jewish labor transported back to Krakow to work in his factory. But now he asked for hundreds of Jews by name, even though it took expensive bribes to the Nazis to get these individuals placed on his employee list.

By the time Germany fell to the allies, Oskar Schindler had spent almost his entire fortune (or should we say invested his entire fortune) preserving 1100 Jewish people from almost certain death.

This extraordinary transformation was brought to the movie screen by Steven Spielberg in "Schindler's List". We will watch a scene that takes place near the end of the movie, on the eve of Germany's official surrender. In the presence of the Jews whose lives he had saved and who were now being freed, Oskar (played by Liam Neeson)

²¹ This represents a major transformation from my perspective as a young adult who at the time embraced the FIRE movement and had explored projections to determine whether I would be able to afford to retire by age 50.

talks to his right-hand man, a Jewish accountant named Itzhak Stern (played by Ben Kingsley) and reflects back over what he did and didn't do.

[View movie excerpt²²]

Initially obsessed with amassing an earthly fortune, Oskar Schindler's life was transformed as he came to recognize the amazing opportunity and privilege he had to utilize material resources to save the lives of 1100 Jews, an impact that has since multiplied to their more than 8000 descendants.

In this scene from the movie, we saw Oskar at a point of perfect clarity. He wished he hadn't wasted so much money, and that he had exchanged his car and gold pin for even more lives, but by that time the war was over and it was too late for him to make those decisions.

As people who have believed in Jesus for eternal life and who now want to live for Him, we have the even greater opportunity during our lives on earth (our window of opportunity) to be generous with our material resources, our resources of time and energy, to carry out God's kingdom purposes that have eternal impact.

If we understand and believe what Scripture teaches that giving

- Touches lives for eternity;
- Stores up treasures for us in heaven; and
- Brings us great happiness now because we are wired to give;

we will embrace living generously as indeed the "more blessed" way.²³

²² The clip that was played is from approximately 2:20 to 4:15 in this [YouTube video](#).

²³ After completing the primary content of this sermon, I "happened across" a 2019 Randy Alcorn book that I was not previously familiar with, [Giving is the Good Life](#). In this book Alcorn covers many of these same truths (e.g., Matt. 6:19-21, 1 Tim. 6:17-19, "life indeed") in book-length form, while also including dozens of real-life stories of people who have experienced the "more blessed" way of generosity. I heartily recommend this book to anyone interested in further exploring generosity and especially the Bible's extended teaching on how generosity benefits the one who gives, both in this life and in the life to come.

Appendix: A Pastor's True Story²⁴

This is the true story of a pastor who helped plant a church in the western U.S. just a few years before Dave did, and where he like Dave expected to pastor his entire life.

This pastor and his wife had opened their home to a pregnant teenager and helped her place her baby for adoption in a Christian home. This was part of his journey to advocate for the unborn that led him to serve on the board of a pregnancy resource center and to begin participating in peaceful, nonviolent civil disobedience at abortion clinics. He was part of a group that stood in front of the doors of those clinics to advocate on behalf of unborn children scheduled to die. He did this nine times in a twelve-month period and was arrested seven of those times.

An abortion clinic won a court judgment against his group, which the pastor and several others refused to pay since the money would help fund more abortions. When he learned that his church was about to receive a writ of garnishment from the court which would force the church to surrender one-fourth of his wages each month to the abortion clinic, he resigned his position as pastor.

Another court judgment followed, involving another abortion clinic. In 1991 a jury majority awarded the abortion clinic \$8.2 million dollars, averaging about \$250,000 per defendant. It was the largest judgment ever against a group of peaceful protestors. It seemed likely the lives of this unemployed pastor and his family would be crushed under this mountain of debt.

Along with pastoring and advocating for the unborn, he also had a passion for writing and had published five books prior to having to resign as pastor. He founded a new ministry which received all the royalties from his books. He worked for that ministry at minimum-wage (which the law in his state did not allow to be garnished), and which employed his wife at a secretary's salary. Suddenly his books started appearing on bestsellers lists and royalties began to increase dramatically.

The original court judgment of \$8.2 million was in force for ten years. The abortion clinic was frustrated that it hadn't received very much money—and none at all from the pastor because he was still working at minimum wage. The clinic went to court to get the judgment extended for another ten years, so the pastor ended up making minimum wage for twenty years.

By all appearances, the court judgments would be expected to have a devastating outcome. But this pastor's testimony is that those judgments were among the best things that ever happened to him. What others intended for evil, God intended for good (as Joseph so powerfully stated in Genesis 50:20).

Since the pastor began that ministry 30 years ago, by God's grace, over eleven million books have been sold. And the ministry has now given away more than \$8.2 million dollars in royalties—an amount that has surpassed the judgment against him and the entire group of advocates for the unborn all those years ago!²⁵

Some of you may be familiar with this story. The pastor's name is Randy Alcorn. And the ministry Alcorn founded was (very aptly) named Eternal Perspective Ministries (EPM). Living with an eternal perspective, he and we understand earthly riches are uncertain, "it is more blessed to give than to receive", and by living generously God gives us richness of life and the amazing opportunity to store up treasure in heaven.

²⁴ I originally planned to use this pastor's true story illustrating the uncertainty of earthly riches and the "more blessed" way of generosity in the sermon but was not able to include it due to time limitations.

²⁵ For many years EPM has donated 100 percent of its book royalties to a wide variety of Christian missions, famine relief, and pro-life ministries.