

Acts 20:35

“Generosity”

Today we are completing our sermon series on, “Enough: Discovering Joy Through Simplicity and Generosity.” So today we are going to spend some time exploring what it means to be generous. Why does being generous matter, and how exactly does my tithe bless God?

I’m not sure how many of y’all know this, but I try really hard to balance the time I spend working at church with the time I spend with my wife and kids. I find this to be really beneficial. I learn a lot about who God is and how we are to relate to God by spending time with my family. One of the things I am discovering is **we were made to be generous.** (repeat x3) Here’s the proof for my argument. Gary, would you please put that image up on the screen. The day after we brought Gabrielle home from the hospital she was crying first thing in the morning. Brock, my 19 month old, walks over to the swing and gives his newborn baby sister a hug. Brock doesn’t have any money, a medical degree or the ability to make toast, but what he does have is himself. Brock gave of himself to comfort his newborn baby sister. From this simple act of compassion and generosity I conclude we were all created to be generous creatures. We were made that way. When we are at our best we are generous with our time, our money, our possessions, and our affections. We help the weak, nurture the young, protect the elderly; fight for the rights of people everywhere, and give to support God’s work.

In the book of Acts chapter 20 verse 35 it says;

**“In all things I have shown you that by so toiling one must help the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, ‘It is better to give than to receive.’”**

As Christians we already know this. **(Point to my head.)** But the problem is there are other voices or tensions pulling at us all the time. There are two in particular; one voice says, **“if you are generous you will not have enough money for you or your family.”** (repeat 2x) The second voice says, **“If you are generous you will not have enough money for the things that make you happy.”** (repeat 2x) We struggle with these forces all the time. These forces or temptations would steal from the joy from our hearts and cause us to squander the gifts God has given.

So let’s put all of this into focus. Our ability to tithe is a gift from God. **(pause)** Yes. Tithing is a gift from God. Tithing is a gift. We were made to be generous. Now, I recognize this is going to sound a little graphic, but it’s important. We were created to be generous, the problem is when we listen and act upon those outside voices we find ourselves becoming spiritually - constipated. **(pause)** The God stuff simply won’t come out. **(pause)** Maybe there is something to that old adage an apple a day keeps the doctor away.

Here’s an example from the Reverend David Slagle of Atlanta. So here before me are ten apples, and they represent the whole of our finances. There are nine red gorgeous apples, and one green apple. The red apples represent the money God says is ours to spend. We can spend it on taking care of our family and to clothe ourselves. We are to use these red apples for food and shelter, and saving for retirement, and helping out the South Davidson Family Resource Center. We can give some of that money to friends. We put some of that money away for our kids’ college education. The green apple belongs to God. The green apple is a way for us to fight off those contrary cultural voices that tell us to spend, spend, spend. The green apple is our way of showing our devotion to God. Then God is going to use that green apple for God’s purposes.

Here’s the problem. Our society and our culture pull us in A LOT of different directions until these nine red apples just aren’t enough. How can we do all of the fun stuff? How can we do all of the cool stuff, and have

the cool clothes and the cool cars, and the cool house, and still find the money to pay the bills, and save for retirement? How in the world can we do all of that on nine apples? So we start thinking the Lord won't mind if I borrow a bit from God. There's that trip we've been wanting to take. Surely God won't mind that. Then there's that unexpected car repair. God will understand we don't need to be stuck on the side of the road. That's not safe. And, and Oh! Wait! Look! Christmas is coming. I don't have anything set aside for Christmas. I need to take just a little more of God's apple to buy those Christmas presents. Surely God will understand I need to be generous to my kids and my family. And I'll hit the Black Friday sales! God won't mind. Oh and what about retirement. It's coming quicker than you think. I can't stop spending from the red apples I'll have to take a little more from God. Then sure enough there will be a medical emergency, or the stove or refrigerator will break down and we haven't taken any of the money from those nine delicious apples and saved it for these instances. The next thing you know we are spending out of that tenth apple just like any of the rest. It's time to buy a new car, and the national college football championship is coming up so we need a new big screen TV for that. Then there's that new house we've been eyeing because where we live now no longer satisfies us. And pretty soon there's not much left of God's apple, oh wait. **(take a bite out of the core)** And then we say, "Here ya go God. This is your part." I think this is a pretty compelling example of what happens to the money in most of our households.

I recognize it is a challenge to tithe. I also recognize that for some in this room there is no way you can give the full ten percent. So let's look at it this way. On the back of your bulletin there is a place where you can set a goal for your household. If you were to start tithing today, how much of your income could you tithe? Please circle one of those numbers right now. **(pause)** Circling a number on a page is great, but it's also a pie crust promise. It is easily made and easily broken. What would it take to meet that goal? Can you think of three small ways to change your spending that would allow you to reach the goal you just circled? Keep in mind Christmas is just around the corner. If we are serious about this goal we need to plan for Christmas spending as well.

Ultimately, what I am asking you to think about is the legacy God is expecting to leave through each of us. When we die what will people say about us? Where will people have seen God at work in our lives? Will people say, "he talked a lot about God, but he never lived out their faith," or, "She could quote chapter and verse about every little thing I did wrong, but I never saw her help anyone else"? Will they talk about the role we play as the single leading cause of Atheism in the world today; as we praise God with our lips and then are completely disarmed by our lifestyle?<sup>1</sup> **(pause)** Or will our children tell the story of the day we embraced God's gift of free grace, turned away from our selfishness, and started to make a change. Will our grandchildren have an example to follow in terms of being generous for God and to others? Sisters and brothers consider for just a minute what it might look like to put God first with our finances? How might our households be changed for the better if we paid the tithe as the first check we right out of every paycheck?

Brothers and sisters do we have the courage to find out what it can look like in our lives to lean into God's grace with our money? You know. At one time Central organized and bankrolled the Methodist Protestant Children's Home. We built three buildings for this church including the one we are worshiping in this morning. Those bills were paid off quickly. Let us honor the way God has moved in our past by being willing to follow God in the here and now. Now is the time to be courageous for Jesus Christ and lean into God's promises for an abundant life today and tomorrow.

In Jesus' Name, Amen

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/283520-the-greatest-single-cause-of-atheism-in-the-world-today> (viewed 11-15-17)