

The Heart Behind It

Good morning. If I haven't had the chance to meet you yet, my name is Marcus and I am one of the pastors here at City Church. If you have your Bible go ahead and turn to **1 Chronicles:29:10** for me. Last week we kicked off our Give Like God series. **And our big idea is that God has been generous towards us, like unbelievably generous, and as his people we are called to also be unbelievably generous to others.** So as we get started today, I want to get us going this morning. I want a show of hands. How many of you have ever heard the phrase '**God loves a cheerful giver**'? So for me, this is something I heard just about every Sunday at church. It was mostly in prayers right before we were to give our tithe and offerings. And not sure if it was meant as a guilt trip type thing or a nice scriptural way to Jesus juke us into giving. And while I always tried to play it off like I knew what it meant, I really didn't know what being a cheerful giver meant, because to me being a cheerful giver was like being a satisfied Tennessee fan. Especially listening to this as a kid right. Like I'd like to remember past Marcus being like, look I like the idea of being a cheerful giver, but I'm also trying to save up to get me a WWE action figure fam. You know so I can be a cheerful giver...just to myself. So needless to say I never really understood this at a practical level. I sort of understood, sure God loves someone who gives cheerfully but what does that really mean right. Like for real for real. Like how does one obtain this cheer because I've never been taught how to give in this way. And maybe a lot of you who heard this growing up or are hearing it for the first time feel what I've felt for a minute. Now I'm sure many of us are on board with the whole 'being generous' thing, but to ever and always do that cheerfully just seems a bit unrealistic. Parting with your money feels a little less cheerful and a little more like teeth pulling. So today, what we will talk about, I think will put you and I on a path towards being a cheerful giver. I'm not saying by the end of this teaching you're going to be cheerfully giving your money away, but I do feel good about saying this is a start. Now hear me say it may not seem like it but this is a massive shift, so get out your notes app or journal and kick off with some history to set up 1 Chronicles.

So back in the day around this time, God's people understood the presence of God to primarily reside in a physical location. So God came down from heaven to chill with his people. For a while, that place was called the tabernacle and then later on they called it the temple. And this temple was a physical building where God's people would come together to worship, and make offerings and interact with God himself. Now as we know that's not how God operates these days, but back then that's how things went down.

And where we pick up on things is God's people are in need of said temple. And for them building this temple would need to be a community project. It would take all of God's people being on a united front, offering materials, man power, money, all the resources to make this happen. So at this point, Israel's king, David, has just asked all of God's people to do just that and they step up to the plate. **God's people have rallied together to provide every last bit of funding and materials necessary to build a magnificent temple where they can meet with God.** So now that we have some context, let's see what King David has to say in v10:

*[10] David praised the Lord in the presence of the whole assembly, saying, "Praise be to **you, Lord, the God of our father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting.**" [11] **Yours, Lord, [somebody say yours Lord] is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is [whose church fam] yours. Yours, Lord, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. [12] Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all. [13] Now, our God, we give you thanks, and praise your glorious name.***

I love David here. David just oversaw one of the most successful giving campaigns in Israel's history and as he's addressing the people who made it a success he doesn't be like, "I'd like to thank so and so and their momma and them." He doesn't start by thanking any of the people who gave the stuff. No, he gives all glory and honor to God himself. He touts the *Lord's* greatness. He says everything **[somebody say everything]** belongs to, and comes from God himself. And just so we don't get it twisted, David hits us with the list. He says: **greatness, power, glory, majesty, splendor, wealth, honor, strength, power—in case yall missed it the first time, and for the record everything else in heaven and earth.** For David, every single thing that exists rightfully belongs to God himself.

Here's another way the bible puts it in **Psalm 50** **[this time it is God talking, so he's going to use the term "mine" instead of "yours," but it's the same idea]:**

*For every beast of the forest is [whose church fam] **mine**, the cattle on a thousand hills. [11] I know **all** [somebody say all] **the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine.** [look at this line] [12] **"If I were hungry, I would not tell you** [God wit tha shade before shade throw'n was cool], **for the world and its fullness are** [one last time church fam?] **mine.***

Y'all didn't think y'all were gonna get this much interaction today did you? So after reading this passage in case you were wondering about what's God's and what's yours, am I preaching yet. Let me start over, in case you were wondering, what's God's and what's yours, I think God has made it pretty clear what's his. God just said I own everything. Growing up I hung out with my cousins a lot. And one time one of my cousins got an attitude and stormed out of the house and slammed the door. And her mom, my aunt, immediately went "don't you slam MY DOOR like that. This is my house, so that's my door. Don't slam MY door like that. God just told errrboddy, this is my house. I own evvvveerrryyytthhhiinnngggg. But you might say, but God, I work a 40 hour a week job. I work hard for my money. *And God is like, for sure, but who gave you the strength to work hard. Who gave you the breath in your lungs to work 40 hours a week. But I studied really hard God to be where I'm at in school. I put in some long nights fam. But who gave you the brains to handle all the things? It's kinda hard to remember who gave you that.*

Here's the way **Tim Keller** puts it in his book *Generous Justice*: I think this quote really helps us think critically about all this.

*If you had been born on a mountaintop in Tibet in the thirteenth century, instead of a Western country in the twentieth century, then **no matter how hard you worked, you wouldn't have had much to show for it. If you have money, power, and status today, it is due to the century and place in which you were born, to your talents and capacities and health, none of which you earned. In short, all your resources are in the end the gift of God.***

All of your resources are in the end the gift of God. Everything comes from God himself. Now if you're still having a hard time with this, this might be why: It's been ingrained in us to look at money and stuff as our own.

It's kind of like this. Last year when we inherited this building, we also inherited a dumpster that sits on the property, and inherited the *cost* of having it regularly emptied. After a while we started noticing people who were not us using our dumpster. To the point where when we either used it once or never it still needed to be emptied every few days. So we naturally put a lock on it right. So get this one day Kent is getting off work and he's walking to his car, which is near the dumpster, and sees a lady, we'll call her, I don't know, Karen, cause that seems appropriate; and she is walking with two trash bags in her hands. He introduced himself and explained the situation to her. And from there she went from southern-niceness to angry. She even yelled at him saying "just because you own the dumpster, doesn't mean you get to decide who does and doesn't use it." To

which Kent rightfully said, actually ma'am. That's how owning something works. Ok, so Karen is easy to pick on in this situation right. She's probably been using this dumpster for 2, 5, 10 years of her life without anyone stopping her. What had happened was that she had been treating that dumpster like it was hers for so long, that she had begun to functionally believe it was hers. But just because she was operating like it belonged to her, that doesn't mean that it did.

Here's the plot twist, when it comes to money and our resources: A whole lot of us in this room are Karen. We have operated so long under the impression that our money is our own, that we have begun to functionally believe that it is. So when God says otherwise, we tend to Karen that joint. We fight back some. We get a little defensive. We act a little prideful. I was convicted of this recently as I was writing this sermon actually. **So I'm a graphic designer by trade and profession, and as I was writing this, I got a call to help design something, that could be a nice bonus for the wifey and I, and don't you know it the Holy Spirit slipped into my dms and was like, soooooo, remember that sermon you bout to preach. To which I was like sorry God I already budgeted that money, sooooo I don't know what you want me to do. We've actually trained ourselves to believe God's stuff, his blessings, his gifts, are only primarily for us and us alone, that it really is *our* stuff.**

But it's not like that at all and David knows that. **That's why, despite the *incredible* generosity of the people standing before him in 1 Chronicles, he starts by thanking God for *his* generosity *towards* those people.** He knows that's where it all starts. And then, and *only then*, does David get around to talking to the people who gave. But even when he starts talking about *them*, it's all still from the idea of God's *generosity towards them*. Check it [v. 14](#):

[14] "But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand. [15] We are foreigners and strangers in your sight, as were all our ancestors. Our days on earth are like a shadow, without hope. [16] Lord our God, all this abundance that we have provided for building you a temple for your Holy Name comes from your hand, and all of it belongs to you. [17] I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity. All these things I have given willingly and with honest intent. And **now I have seen with joy how willingly your people who are here have given to you.**

So David's prayer is quite literally, "thank you God for giving us stuff so that we have the opportunity to give you your stuff back." See *central* to his understanding of generosity is that all that stuff ultimately belongs to God anyway. **For us to get anywhere with becoming a cheerful giver, you have to first accept the fact that nothing you have ultimately belongs to you anyway. That car that you bought recently. God's. That beautiful house. God's. Those shoes. God's.**

Here's why this matters for us. **If you don't get this, it will always feel like God's call to be generous is him trying to take something from you.**

You will always feel like when God calls you towards generosity, he is trying to take something that is rightfully *yours*. *But*, when you understand that **every single thing** you have belongs to God, generosity makes total sense: **if it all belongs to God anyway, then doing what he wants with it is a logical response.**

The word the bible often uses to explain this idea is the word *stewardship*. We are to be *stewards* of resources we've been given by God. Now, *stewardship* is definitely a very churchy term, so if you didn't grow up in the church world try thinking of it in terms of a money manager or an investor. **There is a guy I know who is a financial advisor. His job is to take money that clients give him, and invest or manage that money in a way that is in his clients' best interest. The way it's set up, he also gets a cut, but at the same time, he has an obligation to invest that money in ways that most benefit his clients. To the point that there are legal repercussions for him if it is proven that he's doing something other than that. So if he's spending that money willy-nilly, we have a problem. And the reason there are legal repercussions for that is because it's not his money he's investing. It's their money.**

So that is stewardship. And that is precisely how we should view what God has given us. Which is everything from what we read earlier. We are called as followers of Jesus to manage the resources we are given for God's kingdom here. Do we get to benefit from it, yes and amen. God gives good gifts. But if you only operate out of that framework then you will miss how you are to be generously minded and not selfish with God's gifts.

And again, this is something that is taught at an early age. You work for your money, you get to spend it how you want. We are rarely taught, if at all, that the money you make is God's so you should ask God for wisdom on how to spend it. At least that's not how I grew up. In the book of Malachi, God tells his people that haven't been generous that they are actually *stealing* from him. **If we neglect to steward our resources and**

money the way God asks us to, it's not just that we neglected to do something good that we *could've done*—it's that we have actually *wronged God* himself; we have stolen from God. We have mismanaged *his money*.

But fam, when God's people view their money and resources as both coming from God and belonging to God to bless others. When it clicks, we get a beautiful picture of generosity; one that David acknowledges and celebrates in 1 Chronicles 29. And then he says this, in v. 18:

*[18] Lord, the God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac and Israel, **keep these desires and thoughts in the hearts of your people forever, and keep their hearts loyal to you.***

So **David ends all this with a prayer that God would keep this mindset, this attitude towards wealth and generosity in his people for generations and generations to come.** He says, "God, I want to ask you that your people would always think about their money and their possessions in this way—by seeing all of it as belonging ultimately to you and not to them." What an incredible prayer *fam*. One, that God actually answers. So go ahead and look with me on the screen at Acts 4. So we just read about a prayer that David prays, now we're about to read about at least one place where God answered that prayer

*[32] All the believers [so God's people in the New Testament] were one in heart and mind. **No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.** [33] With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. **And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all [34] that there were no [somebody say no] needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales [35] and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.***

So get this, it was apparently fairly normal, in the days of the early church, for there to be "no needy persons" among them at all. Period. See what they would do is that anytime someone had a need, people would sell houses or land or property, and then take those proceeds and give towards whatever needs there were.

So let's say we are all in LifeGroup together, you're welcome, and someone in this room needs \$500 for something. Maybe their car has problems or an unexpected bill comes

up. And I would say typically how many of us operate, at least how I personally operate, is that we will look at our budget and if there is no wiggle room or if we've given all of our generosity monies for the month, we'll be like sorry fam, or we will not respond. I'll pray but I can't give. And hear me say, giving out of your extra and budgeting generosity is huge. Please do this if you're not already. But if there is a level over 9000 then the early church just went Super Sayian.

The early church was set up so that they budgeted and gave out of their extras. But the difference I would say is that when they didn't have the funds so to speak they would sell their possessions in order to help. So the equivalent today would be like, hey someone needs \$500 fam, can you give. And you're nah, but I got this new PS5 that cost \$500, it'll be tough to part with it but let me sell this in order to help. You see that. It's just a different mindset.

And here's *why* people did these things. It's back up in v. 32, don't miss this: it's because none of them saw any of their possessions as their *own*. **In their minds, those houses, that land that they owned ultimately belonged to God.** So whatever need *God* had for it, that was what they knew they should do. They all saw every item they owned as belonging to God. Which meant they did with it what God would have them do. They used them for the good of others. What an incredible picture that is of God's generosity towards us.

So do you see what's happening here? David prays that God would 'keep this heart continually in God's people,' and God does precisely that. He keeps this heart continually in his people.

Okay. So with all that being said, I feel like it would be easy for me to get up here after showing you all those radical examples of generosity in the bible and go, "Alright fam. We've got a long way to go because all you guys are filthy stink'n rich Americans and you all love money too much. So get to work not being selfish you awful human beings and be a cheerful giver like good Christians *used to do*." And I've sat through sermons like that. Some of you may have too.

But here's what's cool for me as one of your pastors teaching passages like these: We see this type of stuff *is happening* in our church as we speak.

I've seen people help pay for others bills either because things were tight or money didn't come in. I've seen people pay for each other's counseling. I've heard about people

having their house furnished because they reached out and asked because they couldn't do it on their own. People gave up their furniture so others could have furniture. I remember a while back that when someone's laptop broke for school, it was replaced not long after, fully paid for. I've heard of people paying for cars so people could have one to be able to drive to work when their car broke down. I've seen people literally make space in their houses to accept someone in the fam needing a place to stay for whatever reason. Like not just one time but multiple times. Now if you are new here or still newer to us, here me say, this type of posture and heart is not to show how awesome we are but to show how awesome God has been to us. That when a need arises, generally speaking, God provides for us to provide for others. He has blessed us to be a blessing. Now I'm not saying we do it perfectly, I'm sure there are situations that sadly fall through the cracks, or when we are selfish with our resources, but by and large I would say the Lord has been gracious to help us to embody this attitude towards our money and resources on a regular basis. So hear me say fam, I believe we are well on our way to being one in heart and mind when it comes to this. Claiming that our possessions are not our own and being able to share everything we have.

Now some of that might just be us giving our *extra*, the *margin* we have in our budget—and that's *fine*. That doesn't make it not *count*. But at the same time I know a lot of us. I know that a lot of us couldn't give the amounts we've been giving without being at least a *little sacrificial*. We're not a "rich church" by any stretch. So if we're giving some of the amounts I know we've been giving to people in need, there's gotta be *some sacrificial generosity going on there*. So let me say that that is not going unnoticed. By us, or by people in our city. We as your pastors are incredibly encouraged by the heart of generosity God is knitting together in you guys. And I believe people outside of our church are taking notice as well.

But I also want to make sure we don't ever forget the *reason why we do what we do*. I think it would be easy in a church like ours, where there *is* generosity happening regularly, to forget the motivation for it all. And really the motivation is the most important thing. So in that vein, I want us to take a look at just one more passage before we're done today. I know we've covered a lot of ground this morning, so thanks for hanging in there with me. This one will be on the screen. Let's look at [2 Corinthians 8](#).

[8] I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. [9] 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.

So Paul could *command* them to give but instead he motivates the early church to be generous with one simple principle. That God through Jesus has been sacrificially generous towards us, so we should be sacrificially generous towards others. That's it. Sacrificial generosity from Jesus works itself out in sacrificial generosity towards others.

If you want to become a cheerful giver—not just someone who gives but someone who loves giving, someone who embodies the heart posture of sacrificial generosity, take a long hard look at the cross. That's where generosity begins. "For the joy set before him, Jesus endured the cross. Jesus could go into the most sacrificial moment of his life, and do it for the joy set before him. And if he can do that, you with the Spirit inside you can do that in regards to your money too.

So let's end here. Band you can come on up. Last week we ended practically. This week we're gonna end more conceptually. Here's the question: **How often do you think about the generosity of God?** Do you think of him as the one who gave you everything? Like literally everything you have. **So if you own a house, your house. Do you think of only ways to use it for yourself or for what God would want? If you have a job, do you think man, I'm so glad I got myself this job. Or do you think I'm so glad God gave me this job; and now I get to also use the paycheck from this job that he's given me for his glory and the way he wants it to be used.** Do you think of God as being *generous to you so you can be generous to others?*

Here's why I want us to consider that question. Because the *answer* to that question is what's behind all of this. If you see everything as yours and only yours and no one else's then it's gonna be real hard to be generous when God asks you too. If you have this mindset it will feel like almost impossible to do in any financial season. But at the same time, **those of us that truly see *everything we have* as coming *from God himself* and therefore existing *for God himself*—are gonna be some of *the most generous people* on this planet regardless of financial season or life circumstance.**

We're gonna be like God's people in 1 Chronicles 29, like the people in Acts 4—people that said "I'm so glad God entrusted me with this stuff so I can find ways to give you your stuff back" **We're gonna live in ways that make us the continued answer to David's prayer.** We're going to become *living demonstrations* of God's generosity towards us. As the Spirit is already doing this in us, I pray he does it more and more. I'd love to pray to that end.