

# The Heart Behind It

If you have a bible, go ahead and turn to **1 Chronicles, chapter 29**. The book most of us spend the majority of our time reading. But for the rest of us, just stop by the table of contents, or just search for it. We'll be in 1 Chronicles 29 here in just a bit. Last week, Marcus **kicked off this series** we've called *Give Like God*. With this series, we're looking specifically at how the generosity of God towards *us* leads to our own generosity towards *others*. That's **the big idea: that God has been unbelievably generous towards us as his people, and as a direct response, we are called to be unbelievably generous too.**

Today, we're gonna look at what I think is a really interesting **Old Testament example** of that idea at work. It's a time when God's people in the Old Testament grasped that big idea really well and acted accordingly. And I think there's a lot we can learn from it. But before we get into the story, let me give you just a little background so that you can have a better idea of what's happening here. Back in the days of 1 Chronicles, God's people understood the *presence* of God to primarily reside in a *physical* location. The place God's presence dwelled was called the *tabernacle*, and then later on it was more broadly called the *temple*. A physical *building* where God's people would come together to worship, and make offerings and interact with God himself.

God **doesn't really operate that way anymore.** The *New Testament* makes it very clear that we, followers of Jesus, or the Church, *are now God's temple.*<sup>1</sup> **God's presence now resides in us, not in a physical structure. This building is not a temple. This is just a building.** It's a building that we're really *thankful* for—and that absolutely houses God's people often as they interact with God. But there's nothing about the building *itself* that makes that possible.

~~As proof of that, when our church first started, we met at a wedding venue downtown. It was an old freight depot. It was also used as a concert venue, and on at least a few occasions, we would show up on Sunday morning and the whole building would smell distinctly either like marijuana or like stale beer—depending on what type of concert it was. And still, smell of stale beer, weed and all—God's people would gather in that venue and the presence of God would be there. And the same is true with this facility, even though it is more of a “church building.” Our hope is that you do encounter God's spirit in~~

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:16, 2 Corinthians 6:16

this space, but that really has nothing to do with the space itself. It has everything to do with the *people of God* using the space. Does that make sense?

But all **that being said**, at the time of 1 Chronicles it was different than it is now. And so where we pick things up in chapter 29, God's people are *in need* of a temple. And building a temple was a *community project*. It took all of God's people coming together and offering up the money and materials and resources they had. It took every one of them chipping in and doing their part. And at this point in the story, Israel's *king*, David, has asked God's people to do that—and they *have*. So what we're about to read is basically David's *thank you* speech in response to all of that.

Let's take a look at what he says. **Starting in v. 10 of ch. 29:**

[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**, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for **everything** in heaven and earth is **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**.

Now I want you to **think about what David just said**. David has just overseen one of the most successful giving campaigns in history. He is now *addressing* the people who *made it* such a success. So that being said, who would you *expect* him to talk about? Who would you expect him to *thank*? This is where you have your end-of-the-campaign moment where you tell everybody how amazing they are and that they're so generous and they're changing the world. And David does get around to some of that *eventually*, but that's not what he does *first*. His main focus is on someone else *entirely*. Who is it on in what we just read? *God*.

So that's a little different, is it not? **We are now about halfway into David's thank you speech and he hasn't really said anything about the people who gave. Instead, he has repeatedly and exclusively acknowledged the incredible riches and generosity of God himself.** So far, *all* he has done is called people's attention to the fact that everything on earth belongs *to*, and comes *from*, *God* himself. That *God* rightfully claims ownership of everything. I say "everything" because according to the passage the list of things that belong to God includes: greatness, power, glory, majesty, splendor, wealth,

honor, strength, power a second time, and oh, in case he left anything out, *everything* [else] *in heaven and earth*. That pretty much covers it *all*, right? **In David's mind, every single thing that exists rightfully belongs to God himself.**

Here's another way the bible puts it in **Psalm 50** [this is God talking, by the way]:

*For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. [11] I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine. [and look at this line] [12] "If I were hungry, I would not tell you for the world and its fullness are mine.*

The **Scriptures consistently teach** that *God rightfully owns everything* single thing that there is. Everything on heaven and on earth rightfully belongs to *him*. **Which means everything you and I have was first given to us by God, and ultimately belongs to him. Everything. Including...and we could say especially...our money and our resources.** Now, you might respond to that by saying, "wait, no it doesn't—I worked really hard to earn and pay for everything I have." Okay, but here's the thing: who gave you the strength and ability to work hard? "Well I learned my work ethic from my parents." Okay, who caused you to be born to those parents? "Well I just studied really hard in school to get ahead." Okay, who gave you the brain and the intellect that enabled you to study hard and get ahead? Are you seeing where this is going? **Everything we have ultimately comes from God and therefore is God's.**

Here's the way the late **Tim Keller** puts it in his fantastic book called *Generous Justice*:

*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.***

Everything comes from God himself. Now, for those of us still having a **hard time** with that idea, here I think is **why**: **I think some of us have operated for so long as if our money belongs to us, that we've actually begun to believe that it is ours.** Even if it isn't. I'll explain it like this. When we inherited this property that we're in right now, we also inherited a dumpster that sits on the property, and inherited the *cost* of having it regularly emptied. Before long, we realized that there were a good number of people

using that dumpster that were not us. To the point that we were having to pay money to empty it more than twice as often as we should have—literally just money in the trash. So we put a lock on the dumpster.

Well then one day, one of our staff encountered a woman they didn't recognize bringing several full trash bags towards this newly locked dumpster. And as politely as possible, they explained the situation to her. And immediately her demeanor changed from pleasant to very, *very* angry and she began to get exasperated and started yelling. She said, and I quote, "I've been bringing my trash to this dumpster for fifteen years! Just because you *own* the dumpster now, doesn't mean you get to decide who does and doesn't *use* it!"

That's actually exactly what it means. But listen—I feel her pain, right? I mean she had been using this dumpster as if it were her own for over a decade! Who was this random person just coming along and telling her she couldn't use it anymore? Here's what happened: **she had been treating that dumpster *like* it was her own for so long, she had convinced herself it was her own.**

Okay. I can't help but think some of us are in a **similar place when it comes to our money**. I think some of us have operated as if all of our money is our own for so long, that we treat any claim God lays to it as *suspect*. Any call to be generous, any wisdom or instruction on what to use and not use our money on, *any* of that triggers immediate skepticism, or even hostility in us...because we have operated as if it's our own for so long. Any time God asks us to do something different with our money, we feel as if he's overstepping his bounds. **And I think what we've actually done is trained ourselves to believe God's stuff is really *our* stuff.**

But it's not. And **David knows that it's not**. That's why, despite the *incredible*—listen, *incredible*—generosity of the people standing before him in this passage, he starts by thanking God for *his* generosity towards those people. He knows that's where it all starts. And then, and *only then*, David gets around to talking to the people who gave. But even **when he starts talking about *their* generosity**, it's all still *centered* on the idea of God's generosity towards *them*. I'll show you what I mean. Pick it back up in v. 14 of our passage. David says:

**[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 ***even in acknowledging*** the extravagant generosity of the people there, David almost downplays *their* generosity and *highlights* the God who made it all possible. **David's prayer is quite literally, "thank you God for giving us stuff so that we could have the incredible opportunity of giving it back to you."** Central to his understanding of generosity is that all that stuff ultimately belongs to God anyway.

Now, here's why *knowing this matters*: **to get anywhere with becoming a generous person, you have to first understand and accept that *nothing you have ultimately belongs to you anyway.* If you don't get that, 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 very logical response.****

The word theologians have often used to explain this idea is the word "***stewardship.***" We are to be *stewards* of resources we've been given by God. Now, the role of a *steward* isn't something we're super familiar with today, but a decent modern equivalent is thinking of it in terms of a *money manager* or financial *investor.* **If you've ever worked with a financial planner, their job is to take money that you give them, and *invest* that money, *manage* that money in a way that is in *your* best interest. And sure, the way it's set up, they also get a cut of it as incentive. There are *some* benefits to them from managing your money well. But at the same time, they actually have an *obligation* to invest your money in ways that *most benefit you.* To the point that there are *legal repercussions* if it is proven they did something other than that. And the reason there are legal *repercussions* for that is because *it's not their money they're investing.* It's *your* money.**

That is how *stewardship* works. **That's the framework** we're given for how we should view what *we're* given by God. It's *his* money; we are simply called to manage it, invest it, and *steward* it in ways that bring about the ultimate good of God and his kingdom here

on earth. Now to be sure, there are some *benefits* to that. God gives us some things to *enjoy* in the process. But that's *secondary*. The *primary* thing we are to do with what we've been given is to manage it, *steward* it in ways that bring about the good of God and his kingdom. And so **if we neglect to steward it in the ways he asks us to, it's not just that we neglected to do something good that we *should've done*—it's that we have actually *wronged God* himself.** I mentioned this a few weeks ago in our Ten Commandments series on stealing, in Malachi, God actually makes this clear. He tells people who haven't been generous that they are actually *stealing* from him. If it is ultimately God's money, then *not* using it the way he wants is actually *theft*.<sup>2</sup> So this is the type of thing that God takes *very* seriously.

**But when God's people see their money** and resources as coming from God and belonging to God, we get something altogether different. We get instead a beautiful picture of generosity like we see in 1 Chronicles 29. Which is why David *celebrates* it, he points out how incredibly beautiful and good it is. 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, right?

Now, next, I want us to see how God *answers* that prayer of David's. Flip over with me a whole lot of pages in your bible to **Acts 4**. So **a lot of time has passed** since this whole situation with King David and the temple. Jesus has come and walked the earth, and then been crucified, he's come back from the dead, and then before ascending back into heaven he has given his followers some last instructions. Those instructions effectively commission this thing called the *Church*—this body of people who are called to live out the way of Jesus and represent Jesus to the world around them. Acts, in many ways, is a book describing how the Church got started doing just that.

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<sup>2</sup> See Malachi 3:8

Now I want you to look specifically at how the author of Acts describes the way the early Church thought about their *money* and *possessions*. Because I think it sounds a lot like what David *prayed* for in 1 Chronicles. Look with me at [Acts 4](#), starting in [v. 32](#):

*[32] All the believers were one in heart and mind. **No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.***

This may sound silly to you, but I think it's a super important distinction to make: **this isn't forced or mandated socialism, this is conscious, willing generosity.** The passage uses the language "*their possessions.*" People still had *legal ownership* of their possessions—their things didn't *actually belong* to others. It was theirs. But at the same time, they *chose* not to see their things that way. **Instead, they believed it was all first God's.** They understood everything they had to be *from* and *for* God. And so they gave generously. Does that mindset sound familiar at all to you? Yep, that's exactly what David talked about in 1 Chronicles. That's exactly what he *prayed* that God's people would continue to remember and practice. And God has been answering that prayer ever since.

Now [keep reading](#), v. 33:

*[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 needy persons among them** (what a statement that is). *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.**

Okay, let's stop here and make sure we understand what this passage is describing. So [here is the way I would guess that most people approach](#) generosity. So let's say someone you know has a \$500 need. Maybe their car broke down, maybe they had an unexpected trip to the hospital—something comes up and they have a \$500 expense to just be able to function in life. Here is the way I often approach that, and I'm guessing a lot of *us* do too. I look at my budget or my account to see if I have \$500 of wiggle room. (For some of us, we know looking is just a formality because we just know there's not an extra \$500 in it.) But *optimistically*, what we do is look at our budget, and we go "do I have \$500?" No, looks like I don't. So I text back my friend and say, "I don't have \$500. Sorry." That's how it normally goes, right? Something like that. And I'm glad we are at least looking to see if we can be generous—that's a great thing to do.

But just so we're clear, **here is the way the early Church** approached that type of situation. If the early church heard that there was somebody in their community that genuinely needed \$500, they looked at their budget, and I asked, "do I have \$500?" And if they *didn't* have \$500, the *next question* they would ask was, "okay then what do I *own worth* at least \$500 that I could *sell*?" All the way up to—according to the passage—their "*land*" and their "*houses*." So like this is not like a little garage sale fundraiser that they're having (not that there's anything wrong with garage sale fundraisers). This is them *liquidating major assets in their possession*, so that they can give to people among them in need. The thought was "well there's no reason for *me* to own *land* if somebody next to me doesn't have what they need." Do you see how different and how *countercultural* that is?

And I want you to see too: this **wasn't a one-off** type of situation. This was a *common occurrence* among the early Church. They didn't make a show of it, this was just how they *operated*. "Oh yeah, last week we had another member sell their house for somebody who had some needs. You know, just your average Tuesday." This was not an isolated incident. This was a *semi-regular occurrence* in the early Church. This was how people thought about their money and their possessions in the early Church as a *pattern*.

And here's **why people did these things**. It's back up in v. 32, don't miss it: 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 anyway.** 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.

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 team. Let's get our act together. We've obviously got a long ways to go because all you guys are filthy stinking rich Americans and you all love money too much. So get to work not being selfish, awful human beings and start sharing your stuff like good Christians *used* to do." And I've sat through sermons like that before. Some of you may have too.

But here's **what's cool for me** as one of *your* pastors teaching passages like these: this type of stuff *is happening* in our church as we speak. **Earlier this year, a college student**



in our church was going to have to take a break from school because his student loans fell through and he couldn't pay for class. And people in our church banded together to give/loan him a combined \$15,000 dollars in just a few weeks so he could still be in school. I have a long history of car issues and anything that can go wrong with a car has probably happened to me. There was one time in particular that I knew was going to be too big of a cost for me to handle at the time and I told someone in LifeGroup how stressed I was about it and before I even left the mechanic, someone in my group called me to say the group wanted to pay for it. I feel like every couple months, I hear stories of people in our church who need something major in their hosue fixed, or need a new car, and their LifeGroup joins forces to help make it happen. I'm not saying we're perfect at this stuff—not at all—but by and large, you guys *embody* this attitude towards your money on a *regular* basis. *I want you to know that.*

And 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.* I know that we could only do that sort of thing if we believed that our money is really God's money, so it only makes sense to do with it what he wants us to do with it. 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 people outside of our church are taking notice too.

So here's all I'll say in response to that: **don't stop**. Keep doing what you're doing. **If you read through the book of Acts, you'll notice that nearly every time it talks about the growth and explosion of the early Church, it's on the heels of the Church being radically generous.** So keep after it. And if you aren't already, continue looking for how to be not just generous, but *sacrificially* generous. Giving not just out of your extra but beyond that too. But at the same time, **I also want to make sure we don't ever forget the reason why we we do this.** I think it would be easy in a church like ours, where there *is* generosity happening regularly, to forget the *motivation* behind 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.

We're going to look at **2 Corinthians chapter 8**. So in 2 Corinthians 8, Paul is speaking to followers of Jesus in a local church, much like ours. Paul has been asking several of the churches he started to save up some money, so that they can all rally together to give towards a particular need. But some time has passed, and Paul gets word that the

Corinthian church hasn't exactly been diligent in setting aside for this need. And so in response, he writes this to them. 2 Corinthians 8, starting in v. 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.*

So Paul **could command** them to give. He really could have. Their church there in Corinth literally *exists in the first place* because of Paul. He could've just written, "hey guys, be generous. Stop being selfish, stop being greedy and materialistic, and just give what I told you to give. Signed, sincerely, *the very reason you exist, Paul.*" He could've said that to them. But he doesn't do that. He chooses a different strategy altogether. Look at v. 9:

*[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 **instead of commanding them, Paul chooses instead to remind them of something.** He chooses to remind them of the generosity of God *himself*. Paul considers that to be a *far more effective* strategy than anything else he could do. He says, "let me remind you of what Jesus did for you. Let me remind you of God's generosity towards you through Jesus." And he trusts that that will motivate the Corinthians to be generous in response.

He chooses to remind them of **something very important about Jesus.** And that's that Jesus himself chose to give up the comforts of heaven and become poor, so that we—you and I, followers of Jesus down throughout history—could become *rich*. **That is how Paul chooses to motivate the Corinthians' generosity. Not with guilt, not with shame, not with commands—but with the unbelievable generosity of God himself in sending Jesus. Because Jesus became poor so that we could become rich.**

Now, something you should know about **the way Paul uses the word "rich"** in this passage—he's not talking about *material wealth*. I know that because earlier in this passage, he says that another group of people, who were poor, showed "rich" generosity. So whatever Paul means by "rich," he does not necessarily mean "materially wealthy." Apparently, it seems like **in Paul's mind, how generous you are has absolutely nothing to do with how much money you have. And instead, it has everything to do with how you perceive God's generosity towards you in Jesus.**

Because **if you understand that Jesus chose to become poor so you could become rich, it is a no-brainer for you to become poorer so other people could have what they need.** That's only logical, right? If Jesus "impoverished" himself more than we could ever imagine on our behalf, then why would we *not* become a *little* poorer so that someone else could become a *little* richer? That would be a very natural response to the generosity of God, would it not?

So I'll just **end here**. Last week we ended very **practically**—this week we're gonna end very **conceptually**. Here's the question I want you to consider: what are your thoughts on the *generosity* of God? When you think of God, do you think of him as being *generous*? Do you think of him as the one who gave you every single thing you possess? **So when you think of your house, do you think "man I sure am glad I worked hard to earn the money to buy this house"? Or do you think, "I sure am glad God gave me the means to buy this house so I can use it for his purposes"? When you think of your job, do you think "I sure am glad I am talented enough to get this job?" Or do you think "I'm glad God gave me this job so I could use it and the paycheck from it the way he wants me to?"** Do you think of God as being *generous*?

Here's why I want us to consider that question. Because the *answer* to that question is what's behind all of this. So here's **what I'd be willing to bet**. Those of us who **see everything as exclusively our own and no one else's**, are going to have a really difficult time with all of God's calls to be generous with our money. It's gonna feel like pulling teeth to get us to loosen our grip on our finances in any way. 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 situation or life circumstances—regardless of any of that.**

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 could be generous with it." **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. So as we conclude this morning, we're going to respond by thanking God for his generosity towards us. Specifically, his generosity in sending Jesus to earth and to the cross, for us. We're going to take communion as a means of remembering that very thing. And as we remember his generosity towards us, we're going to ask him together to keep "that heart in us always" as we follow him. Let's pray together.