

# Stewardship as Counterculture: Stewarding Our Wealth

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 19 November 2017

Preacher: Rev. Thomas Hinson

[ 0 : 00 ] Good evening to all of you. Welcome, especially if you're new or visiting. We are in the middle of a series looking at the concept of stewardship, broadly speaking.

The idea that God owns everything that is, and that whatever in our lives has been entrusted to us, we are to use in ways that reflect his heart, his values, rather than our own agenda.

So we've looked at this and how it applies in a variety of ways. We've talked about stewardship of the environment. We've talked about stewarding our own bodies. We've talked about stewarding our time. And it has gotten personal.

What's been interesting is that week to week, different people have, you know, we've been striking nerves, but different topics strike different nerves and different people.

I think everybody's had their feathers ruffled a bit over the last few weeks. I hazard a guess to say that tonight maybe more feathers than usual might be ruffled.

[ 1 : 08 ] Wells Fargo did a survey of the most challenging, most uncomfortable topics to discuss. And they really wanted to know what's the most troubling issue out there.

And on the top list of most disturbing topics to discuss, you had the usual suspects of death and politics and religion. But by far the most troubling issue is the issue of money, personal finance. That makes everybody uncomfortable. And for that reason, a lot of churches don't ever talk about money. We're more uncomfortable than most at talking about money.

And even in the history of Advent, we've been here 10 years, we've only addressed money a handful of times. But the reason that we need to talk about it, actually there are two reasons. The first reason is that we're doing a series on stewardship, and it would be negligent not to at least spend one evening talking about the concept of money and stewarding our wealth.

But there's an even more important reason. And that is that we're a church who says that one of our three core values is spiritual formation. And you really cannot talk about spiritual formation without addressing our relationship with our stuff.

[ 2 : 27 ] Because spiritual formation is all about the relationship we have with God and with one another. And so our stuff figures largely into those two relationships.

So we're going to be talking about that tonight, the stewardship of our wealth. And we're going to be looking at 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9. Now these are, together, they comprise the most extensive, in-depth teaching anywhere in Scripture on the concept of financial stewardship.

So this is what we're going to be looking at. And the passage really shows us that faithful stewardship, which is, as we said, using our money in ways that reflect God's heart, can be boiled down to one concept, the concept of generosity.

Faithful stewardship means generosity. And so that's what these chapters are all about, generosity. And what we're going to see is that true generosity is three things.

It's evidence of spiritual health and vitality. It's an exercise of faith. And it's an overflow of joy. It's evidence of spiritual health.

[ 3 : 38 ] It's an exercise of faith. And then it's an overflow. It flows out of an abundance of joy in the Lord. Let's pray and then we'll dive in. Our Father, we just prayed this prayer that we would read and mark and learn and inwardly digest your word.

All of it. Lord, we want all of it. Leave nothing out. And so we pray that by the power of your spirit, as we open your word together, that we would be able to be nourished by it.

That you would speak to us in nourishing ways that satisfy our hearts, that grow us more into the image of your son. And it's in his name that we pray.

Amen. Amen. So true generosity, financial stewardship, that looks like generosity, when it's lived out, is evidence of spiritual health.

Now when we talk about spiritual health, what are we really talking about? We're talking about the state of your heart. And if I were to ask you right now, what is the state of your heart? You would probably have a hard time really accurately answering that question.

[ 4 : 49 ] And certainly if I were to say, hey, what's the state of her heart? Or his heart? You would have an even more difficult time. If you think that's an easy question to answer, you've got issues. Nobody can answer that question about other people, much less themselves.

Because why? Unlike Jesus, we can't see the heart. We don't know the truth about people's hearts. Not even our own. And so what we have to do, in order to gauge our own spiritual health, is to rely on indirect measures.

We need barometers barometers that are reliable indicators of the state of our heart, the state of people's hearts. And Jesus teaches that one of the best barometers of the heart out there is the way we spend our money.

And that's what he's talking about in Matthew 6. He says, For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. What he's saying is, if you want to know the state of somebody's heart, look at how they spend their money.

You are how you spend. That'll tell you something. It's reliable as a measure. And this is what 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 are really about. If you were tuned in during the reading, the context, at the particular time that Paul's writing, he's writing about famine relief.

[ 6 : 03 ] There's a famine in Judea. The people there, largely Jews, are poor. They're starving. And so Paul is writing to the Corinthians so that they will give money to help relieve the suffering in Judea.

But one of the things that we need to understand contextually is that at this point, Paul's talking about famine relief, but at other places, Paul talks about Christian giving and takes up collections for other things.

So in Galatians, he talks about the importance of Christians giving to support the church and church leaders. In other places, like Philippians, he references giving to support the work of missionaries and church planting.

In places like this, he talks about the importance of Christians giving to relieve suffering and to care for the poor. So these are all categories that Paul talks about as categories of Christian giving.

Here he's talking about famine relief, but what I want you to notice is that if you read these chapters, chapters 8 and 9, he doesn't really get into or spend much time on the suffering in Judea.

[ 7 : 06 ] In fact, his concern is almost entirely for the Corinthians. And the state of their heart. So as he begins to get into it, you begin to see that the real issue that he's focusing on is the fact that the Corinthians had been giving regularly in the past.

If you see in verse 10, it says that they had desired to give a year ago. But then for some reason, they had stopped giving. So these are people who had been regularly giving and then they stop.

And Paul flags that. Paul's a pastor. He notices that and he says, you know, that may be an indication that something is not right, that there's a deeper spiritual issue.

So he investigates. And what he realizes is that the Corinthian church has become very much like the surrounding Corinthian culture. Corinth was a port city, very wealthy, very cosmopolitan, and as a result, highly materialistic.

And the Corinthians had essentially become like the culture. And a way of summarizing it is they were promiscuous with their bodies, but they were very stingy with their money.

[ 8 : 16 ] Right? And so Paul sees this and he recognizes this is evidence of a lack of spiritual health and vitality. Because spiritually healthy Christians are the exact opposite of that.

In other words, spiritually healthy Christians tend to be stingy with their bodies, but they're promiscuous with their money. And Paul says, that's not what I'm seeing. So I think there's an issue here.

And so this is why Paul says what he does about giving. He doesn't just come in and say, there's a famine in Judea, here's all the statistics, here's all the suffering, and for every dollar you give, here's the impact that you're going to have.

That's not his approach. Right? Paul comes in and he says, in verse 8, chapter 8, I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love is also genuine.

He's saying, you know, I saw you come to faith. I know it was real. I know that you're a believer. I know that love is there. If I command you to do this, it's going to take away your opportunity to do it out of love.

[ 9 : 19 ] That's what it's really about. And then down in chapter 9, verse 7, each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion. He's saying the same thing.

It's not about your money. It's about your motivation. It's almost entirely about your motivation. So see, in one sense, there's material poverty in Judea, but he's as or more concerned about the spiritual poverty right here in Corinth.

He's going for the heart. So how does this apply to us? Well, people all the time ask questions. I've asked these questions over the years myself.

There are a lot of questions around how we think about giving. People say, so how much should I give? When I think about giving, how much should I give? And people say, you know, well, what about tithing?

Are Christians supposed to tithe? Is that like an Old Testament thing? Are we still supposed to tithe? In other words, give 10% of our income. People say, okay, well, if I'm going to tithe, then do I do that on pre-tax or post-tax dollars?

[ 10 : 24 ] And how does that work? And many of us have wondered these questions. Notice, as I said, 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, most extensive teaching anywhere in the Bible on financial stewardship.

Notice what is not mentioned anywhere. Tithing. Paul never mentions it once. Isn't that odd? You know, one of the only times tithing comes up in the New Testament is when Jesus is talking about tithing.

But it's very interesting. Luke 11, listen to what Jesus says. He says, Woe to you Pharisees, for you tithe mint and rue and every herb and neglect justice in the love of God.

These you ought to have done without neglecting the other. So what's he saying? You know, on the one hand, yes, there was an Old Testament command, give 10% of what you produce.

And so the Pharisees were doing that. But they had taken that and gone way beyond that simple command. And they were tithing on everything. They were tithing on their vegetables and on their produce.

[ 11 : 27 ] And they were a little sprig of parsley for the Lord. And every little thing, they were giving 10% away. They were scrupulous and meticulous and exacting to every cent. So they were living up to the letter of the law.

And Jesus says, you know, you should have been doing that but in doing that only you've missed the whole point. The whole point is the love of other people, justice, and the love of God.

You're not doing this with your heart. You're not giving from your heart. In other words, it's not really about God. It's not really about other people. It's really about you.

And so this is this indictment. And he's saying you're missing the whole point. And then he goes on in verse 44 to say, woe to you for you are like unmarked graves.

That's harsh because he's saying you look alive. You look spiritually healthy and vitalized because you're tithing in all these hyper-specific meticulous ways. But the reality is you're spiritually dead.

[ 12 : 29 ] You're unmarked graves. And you know, the message is clear for us. The moment we ask, and I've asked this many times, the moment we ask, so how much should I be giving?

We're missing the whole point. We're missing the whole point. And, you know, this applies in lots of other ways. You know, when people say, well, how far should I go physically with people that I'm dating?

Or, you know, how often should I pray? You say we should be praying, but how often should I really be doing that? Right? The minute we begin to go down that road, we're missing the whole point, which is all about love and fidelity to God and to other people.

Right? So imagine, if you're married, imagine saying, well, how much attention do I have to give you? You know, to your spouse. You know? Or, I know you're upset, but what's the, what's the, how much empathy do I need to give you before I, you know, because I'm busy and I'm tired and what's the minimum standard?

You know, that would be awful and hopefully, you know, hopefully nobody does that. But it's the exact same thing. It's the language of spiritual death. I mean, that's what it is.

[ 13 : 39 ] That's how spiritually dead people talk. And the most amazing thing is this contrast between that mentality and the Macedonians that Paul talks about at the beginning of chapter 8.

The most amazing thing about the Macedonian Christians, these are Christians who are incredibly generous, is not that they were willing to give money even when they were in their own crisis, which by the way, they were.

But that's not, that's not the most amazing thing. And the most amazing thing is not that they were giving way beyond their means, which is also pretty amazing. The most amazing thing, and the reason that Paul brings up the Macedonians as an example is because of what he says in verse 4. He says, they gave of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints. So what's he saying? He's saying, you know what, we saw this crisis in Judea, people suffering, and we thought, who can we ask to give money to try to relieve this?

And we looked at the Macedonians and we thought, you know, they're going through a lot right now and they don't have any money and so we're not even going to ask them. And then the Macedonians come to Paul and they say, why didn't you ask us?

[ 14 : 44 ] We would love to give. We would love to give. How much, how much will you take? Will you take more from us? And Paul says, we weren't expecting this.

It just happened. And the word that Paul uses again and again and again in this passage is the word readiness, which can also be translated eagerness. So spiritually healthy Christians are eager to give.

When somebody comes to them with a need, they say, this is an opportunity. So the language of spiritual health, of spiritual vitality, is not, how much should I give?

It's, how can I give more? Are there other needs that are out there that I might be able to help or alleviate through my giving? So true generosity is evidence of a spiritual health, a spiritual vitality. It's the state of your heart being reflected in generosity. And then if we go a step further, it's also an exercise of faith.

[ 15 : 42 ] It exercises your faith. So what do I mean by that? Well, faith is exactly like a muscle. And it needs exercise.

And many of you are like me. You used to get a lot of exercise. And now maybe you don't get quite as much exercise. And what happens? Right? When your muscles are regularly challenged and maxed out and pushed beyond what they can do, they grow and they get stronger.

Right? If you neglect them and don't use them, they atrophy. They get weaker. And you get weaker as a result. Faith is exactly the same way. If you live the kind of life that is constantly challenging your faith, it will grow.

But if you live the kind of life that shelters your faith, that protects it, so it never has to be used, it will atrophy. And so giving regularly and giving sacrificially is one of the best exercises for faith that there is.

And in chapter 8, Paul is saying that sometimes we are the ones meeting needs and sometimes we are the ones in need, but every day we need to be trusting God, exercising our faith, that God will provide exactly what we need when we need it.

[ 16 : 56 ] That's the exercise of faith. And then he quotes Exodus 16, 18, whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack. Now that's a specific reference back to Exodus when the Israelites are in the wilderness and there's not enough food for them to eat and they're crying out to God because they think they're going to starve to death and God miraculously provides food in the form of manna.

Now manna is some kind of strange flower-like, bread-like substance and there's a lot of arguments and debates over what exactly it was. That's not really our focus here. But the point is is that the people were commanded go out and gather, which they had to go out and gather it, gather only what your family needs for the day.

And then something quite miraculous would happen. Some people, because of injuries or limitations or whatever, wouldn't be able to gather enough. They just wouldn't be able to do it. Other people would go out and they would have their whole team ready and they would gather and hoard tons of this stuff because that's human nature.

God makes it miraculously appear on the ground and you go and you pick it up and all of a sudden you deserve it. You're entitled to it. And that's what happened in Israel.

You know, I saw that play out with my boys the other day. Just, just, just a Saturday, yesterday, I had all three kids read the playground and I'm, I walk around the corner and I see all these pennies and all these coins that have just some, you know, fallen out and I look around and there's nobody, nobody at the playground so all these coins are just laying on the ground.

[ 18 : 25 ] So I say, Riley, come over here. Look, look at all this. And Riley just immediately starts gathering up all these coins as fast as he can. He goes, Dad, I'm going to be rich. And I was like, well, you know, it's a start.

And he's, you know, gathering it all up and has this thing. And then Matty turns and he says, what are you doing? And Maddox, my other son, starts running toward us and I say, Riley, you should share some of that with Maddox.

And Riley goes, no. He's like, it's mine. You know? I mean, he didn't even know it existed two minutes ago. That's human nature.

That's human nature. And that's what, exactly what happened with the manna. But what happened? The people who didn't think they had enough actually found that at the end of the day they had enough. It miraculously increased.

Vice versa, the people who gathered way too much and hoarded it, they woke up in the morning and it was rotten and infested with worms and inedible. And this is the principle of wealth that we see sort of embodied in manna.

[ 19 : 26 ] God is training his people to exercise their faith to be able to handle wealth. To be able to handle it. And the connection between manna and wealth is made explicit in Deuteronomy 8.

It says, take care lest you forget the Lord your God in verse 1 and then go all the way down to verse 16 who fed you in the wilderness with manna that your fathers did not know that he might humble you and test you meaning train you work out your heart to do you good in the end.

This is for your benefit. I'm training you to be able to handle wealth. Why? Because his promise was to give them a land, a homeland and to bless them with abundance of wealth and provisions.

Food and tons of land to graze on and everything they could ever want. But he says, before I give this to you I need to be able to know that your heart can handle it. So I'm training you now.

Preparing you for that. And he says, beware lest you say in your heart my power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth. You know, just think of Riley. Mine. I got this.

[ 20 : 34 ] It was the sweat of my brow. I gathered them up. Right? That's what we say about our job. I work hard for this money. All the things I do for money. To put food on the table. Right?

Beware lest you say my power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth. You shall remember the Lord your God for it is he who gives you power to get wealth. It is he who gives you the family.

It is he who gives you the genetics. It is he who gives you the education. It is he who gives you the privilege. It is he who gives you the relationships and the connections. It is he who gives you the opportunity. Beware lest you say you did this yourself.

And so we're meant to see all of wealth as a form of manna meant for the good of everyone. Not just me. And so this is the principle that Paul's talking about.

I'm training you to be able to handle wealth because what I want to see, the way I want you to steward this is with an eye toward the whole. Is everybody sufficiently provided for?

[ 21 : 33 ] That's the point. He says unless your heart can handle wealth you're going to have people hoarding it. You're going to have other people going without. This is not something that could be enforced.

This is not talking about a form of socialism or communism. It can't be enforced top down. It has to be inside out. Your heart has to work this way. That's the purpose of the training.

So what does this mean for us? Well, we could talk a long time about all the ways that this applies but I'll just hit one for the sake of time. This manna and the reference to manna that Paul makes is I think meant to teach us a theology of sufficiency or you might say a theology of enough.

I said at the beginning of this series that it was going to be the title of the series is stewardship as counterculture meaning if we live as stewards in all these various ways we will by default become more and more and more countercultural and here's where you see the countercultural practice clearly because we live in a culture of more and we are bombarded by ads that are convincing us that we need more.

More, more, more. We need bigger houses. We need, you know, I mean, and everybody, you know, it's hard to live in D.C. But one of the most common complaints not only that I hear but that I feel in my own heart is, man, we just need a bigger place.

[ 22 : 58 ] You know, we don't even have a closet anywhere on our first floor. Our vacuum cleaner just sits in our dining room, you know, but then there's somebody else who's like, you have a dining room? And everybody, everybody, everybody says we need more and in fact people don't actually think they need a ton more, they just think we just need a little more.

I mean, if you look at the research, it's surprisingly consistent that people say, you know, when people are asked how much more money do you think would make a meaningful difference in your life?

Really get you where you need to be. Help cover your expenses, have a little left over to have fun, put some away in savings, start saving for your kids' college fund, how much more would you need to really get there? You know what most people say?

They don't say that they need double or triple what they make. The majority of people say about 10% more. If I just had a little notch up, a little 10% increase. But then guess what happens?

If you follow those people, as some researchers have done, and you ask them years later, once they've gotten that increase, hey, are you good now? They say, well, you know, actually, if I had about 10% more, I'd be great.

[ 24 : 03 ] And why? Because our lifestyle increases and keeps pace with our income. And for some of us, the lifestyle outpaces our income. But you get a raise and boom, instantly your lifestyle grows to fill it.

So what if we viewed our lives the way God called the Israelites to view theirs, and we viewed our wealth the way they were called to view their manna?

In other words, what if we sat down and intentionally separated out our true needs from our wants? And really made a clear line there. And what if we decided on an amount that would be enough?

I know many families, many households who have done this. Here's what we need, and this is enough. This is what we need to live and to provide for our kids.

What if we cultivated a daily trust in God's provision, lived in such a way that we need God to provide, need God to come through?

[ 25 : 05 ] We don't necessarily have a gigantic nest egg hidden away. And here's the really, I think, the challenging piece to this. What if the goal of salary increases, the goal of wise investments, what if the goal of that was actually not to increase our quality of life and lifestyle?

What if the goal of that was to be able to give more away? And what if that was the thing that excited us about getting a big raise? Now I can give more away.

Now, I mean, I say this is countercultural because I think it doesn't come naturally to any of us.

Right? But true generosity is both evidence of spiritual health and it's an exercise of faith. When you've exercised your faith and it's gotten stronger and stronger and stronger, is it conceivable that we might get to that place where we say, you know, I just want to be able to give more away.

That's why I want to make more money. Now I know that, stop here for a second and just say, I know that as I'm saying all this, you're probably feeling like I was feeling as I'm working through this a few days ago, which is kind of stressed out.

You know, if we can be totally honest, I think most of us are probably high on our list of sources of anxiety is money and just making it work. And D.C. is an incredibly expensive place to live and we're already trying to struggle and to make it happen.

[ 26 : 24 ] And so this just feels, you know, you're already stressed and you're like, well, I was already anxious about money and now I feel guilty. On top of the anxiety, I feel now guilt and there's this added layer that's just making it more stressful.

And I get that. And I think if we were to end here and say, therefore, go and be generous, we would all go out and the first question we'd ask would be, now how much should I give, right?

Is it pre-tax or post-tax? That's how we would operate, right? And we would go the road of the Pharisees. What's the minimum standard so I'll be good with you and I'll be good with the church and I'll be good with God and I can just, you know, what is it?

And so that's the road to death. We can't go down that road. And so this third point is crucial. The third point is that true generosity is an overflow of joy.

It's an overflow of joy. Which means, and listen very carefully, it cannot be manufactured. It cannot be required by government policy. It has to be an overflow.

[ 27 : 24 ] It has to be an outpouring of something that's going on in our hearts. And this is what makes Christian giving unique and distinct from any other kind of giving.

It's not motivated by the approval of others. By the way, in our church, we take great lengths to make sure that, you know, other than the treasurer, really nobody knows who gives what. I know very little about the specifics of who gives what. Because we want people to know that when they give, it's not about the approval of others. There's not going to be any kind of special recognition, you're not going to get a plaque if you gave X amount.

Because it's not about that. Christian giving is not about that. It's not motivated by tax deductions. It's not motivated by returns on investment or immediate observable impact.

It's not motivated by any of those things. It's motivated by joy. And Paul really talks about two sources of joy that I want to hit really quick with the time we have left. He talks about the joy of the harvest.

[ 28 : 26 ] And he talks about the joy of the love of God. The joy of the harvest and the joy of the love of God. The wellsprings of Christian generosity. The joy of the harvest.

Paul says in chapter 9, verse 6, the point is this, whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly. And whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

Now let me say this, a lot of people take this verse and they justify what's known as the prosperity gospel. They say, you sow, meaning give a little bit of money to the ministry, you sow, and then down the road you sow seeds of faith, you sow a little bit of money, and down the road you will reap a harvest.

And, which means more money. So you, and it says, well if you give a little bit of money, you're only going to get a little bit back. If you give a lot of money, you're going to get a lot of money back. And that's how the prosperity gospel works.

And it's false. It's a false teaching. Because it's cherry picking a verse out of the context. If you look at the context, it's saying something very different. If you continue reading, it's not about getting a financial return.

[ 29 : 35 ] Paul talks about the harvest, you know, when we give money financially, out of generosity. We do reap a harvest. But it's a harvest of three things. It's a harvest of good works.

Meaning, the more you give, the more good is going to happen. The more God is going to increase your capacity to do good works. You know, in other words, generosity begets generosity.

The more generous we are, the more generous we will be. And God will enhance and expand our ability to be more generous and do more good in the world. So that's the first thing.

We'll reap a harvest of good works. We'll also reap a harvest of righteousness. And in this context, righteousness is God's righteousness. It's God's desire and ability to put right the world.

Righteousness. To put things right. To fix human relationships. To fix all that is broken in the world. And so, in other words, it's saying, when Christians give, our giving becomes a part of the healing and the restoration of the world.

[ 30 : 37 ] There's a harvest of rightness, righteousness. God putting things right. And then thirdly, it's a harvest of thanksgiving. Thanksgiving. Very appropriate, given the upcoming holiday.

It's a harvest of thanksgiving. And I think this is really beautiful. Paul says, here's why you should give and here's why it should fill you with joy. The more you give, the more there are people out there who will see your gift as a provision of the Lord.

And they're not just going to thank you. They might not even know it came from you. They're going to thank God. And he says, the more you give and the more that impacts other people's lives, the more people there are giving thanks and praising God.

And he's saying, that's the whole point, is having everybody praising God and recognizing Him as the provider. He says, when we look at that, the harvest of, the increase of good works, the increase of the rightness in the world, more and more people giving thanks and praise to God, he says, that is a source of joy.

That makes you want to give more. And then the other, the other source of joy and the real source of joy in the Christian life is the joy of God's love.

[ 31 : 45 ] So our last question, what is the real secret of Macedonian generosity? Paul says, in the beginning of chapter 8, they gave beyond their means, they begged us to be able to give more, and

this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.

So the reason that they gave so freely of their money is because they had already given themselves to the Lord. He asked, well, why would they do that? Well, grace. The answer is grace. Verse 9, for you know that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

So he's saying, Jesus is the true rich man. He has everything. All of everything belongs to him. All power and glory. And then Jesus looks at us. And you know, by the world's standards, we may look wealthy.

You know, maybe you have a house that you own. Maybe you have money in the bank, right? Maybe you have a car or two. Maybe you have all of these things and you look like you're doing pretty well.

[ 32 : 53 ] And he says, but in reality, when Jesus looks at you, he sees the truth. That spiritually speaking, we are destitute, we are homeless, and we are starving to death.

And Jesus looks at our poverty and he looks at his wealth. And then he looks at our poverty and he's compelled by his love to give up all of that wealth to become himself poor, destitute, homeless, starving, and ultimately to suffer and to die to guarantee that those who come to him will never have to suffer that again.

That they will inherit an eternal wealth. And so, you know, I know a lot of religions out there say God cares about the poor.

You should care for the poor because God cares for the poor. That's common. You know, the most kind of, you know, stridently atheist secular humanists will say we should care for the poor.

But only Christianity, as far as I know, says that God became poor. And that kind of love is what changes stingy hearts into generous hearts.

[ 34 : 08 ] It can't be done any other way. It's only when that love strikes you and only when you see yourself as being poor and then seeing what Jesus did for you that you will then begin to become generous yourself.

It melts your heart. So Christian generosity is not about giving your stuff away. It's about giving yourself away to the one who gives himself away for us. That's the wellspring of joy in the Christian life.

So we're out of time. I just want to, I want to take all this and pull it together and give you a couple of things to think about as we transition and ultimately go into our lives tonight and tomorrow. As we're thinking about stewardship in general every week, I've encouraged you to go home, to pray, to think, think about your life, decisions that you're making and imagine what this would look like if it began to actually shape how you make decisions.

And I want to encourage you to do this as you think about your finances. And if you are, you know, if you have a, you know, somebody with whom you share finances, then the two of you should sit down and have these conversations.

I just, I want to give you a couple of things as you think about having those conversations to hopefully help you. Number one, generosity requires thoughtful, prayerful planning.

[ 35 : 23 ] It's not just about getting caught up in a moment writing a check. We don't even write checks anymore. But it's not about getting caught up in the moment. It's about planning.

It's about preparation. It's about thoughtful intentionality. If you've never thought about this before, now's a great time to start. Most people haven't.

No. So now's the time to start. Especially if you're a parent or if you're thinking about having kids down the road, many people, most people who give regularly as adults when they're asked what influenced you to do that, most of those people will say that their parents did.

That that's where they learned it. And not just parents putting a dollar in their kid's hand to put in the plate as it comes around, but parents actually encouraging their kids to take some of their own money and put it in the plate or give it to the person who needs it.

It's a way of habituating this from an early age. So that's the first thing. It requires intentionality, prayerful thoughtfulness. I mean, Paul says you should give what you've already determined in your heart to give.

[ 36 : 32 ] That implies an intentionality there. The second thing I'll say is this. Generosity is not about how much money you have. There's really no correlation. It's about your heart.

It's about the motivation. It's about the joy. Statistically speaking, if you look at at least in our country, if you look at all the people who regularly give to their churches, the majority of those people have a combined household income of less than \$50,000.

So it's not the wealthy who are regularly giving. It's people who make under \$50,000 who are regularly giving. And by the way, I said I don't know any statistics about specifics in our church. I don't know who gives how much. but our treasurer has told me that even in our church that bears out. That if you look at our top 10 givers across Brooklyn and Columbia Heights, apparently that top 10 includes a number of people who are young, who are just getting started in life, who maybe have their first job.

So there's this sense I think that a lot of us have that when I get older, when I'm adulting full time, maybe when I'm married, when I'm a little more secure, then I'll start.

[ 37 : 44 ] But statistically, people who start in their 20s are much more likely to do this through their lives. People who wait until their 30s or their 40s, the likelihood drops way down that you'll ever do it. So statistically, the earlier you start, the more likely you are to continue.

So it's not about money. It's about the state of your heart, priorities. So true generosity as we think about this, true generosity isn't about all of the ways that it can be mishandled in the church, all the ways that it can be mishandled in the world.

True generosity is something that cannot be regulated or enforced. It's evidence of spiritual health and vitality. It's an exercise of faith. And then lastly, it's this overflow of this wellspring of joy that comes from belonging to the one who gave himself up for you.

Let's pray.