

A New Generous Life

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Preacher: Rev. Suzy Kirkham

[0 : 00] If we're going to follow Jesus, then we have to be more like him and be generous in how we live. So this morning, I'm just going to share a couple of things that I hope is going to help us to live a new and a generous life.

I think it goes really well today with the fact that it's Covenant Sunday, where we've all prayed a prayer of commitment for this year and for what we're going to do on Mission for God. And key to being a generous people, I think, is that we have to be a thankful people that know how to count our blessings. Counting our blessings is a bit of an old fashioned term.

But I think especially in these difficult and challenging times, when it can be so much easier to just lament and count the things that we lack in our lives, counting our blessings is vital.

We can look at other people and we can think, oh, if I had this or if I had that, I could be far more generous than I am. But if we focus on the lack in our lives, we then develop a poverty mentality.

[1 : 08] And that's not going to help us to be generous at all. But if we learn how to count our blessings, I'm sure we're going to be really surprised. We're going to be both surprised at how blessed we are.

But also, I think that we're going to also be surprised at how generous we're not. There are tons of things in the Bible and verses that encourage us and remind us to be thankful.

But I've just noted a couple down. Psalm 103 says, This is an amazing blessing.

Because I know what I'm like. And I know that when I've lost my temper this week, I know when I've shouted out the kids. And I know actually where my mind's gone some days when it's been Groundhog Day of lockdown.

But you know what? Because of the blood of Jesus, I'm free. And in Peter, it tells us that we should cast our anxiety on God. Because he cares for us.

[2 : 19] The Lord God Almighty, the creator of heaven and earth, he loves and cares for us so much that he wants us to cast our anxieties on him. We can, as Christians, feel that actually we feel shameful if we have anxiety, that we should have it all together and we should be full of the joy of the Lord all of the time.

But no, the Apostle Peter acknowledges that we're going to have anxieties, but that we're not called to carry them and that we have to give it to God. So I encourage you to do that too. And 2 Corinthians really encourages me because it reminds me that we're going to be renewed every single day.

God's not finished with us yet. I'm so pleased God's not finished with me yet. Although he's done an amazing work, he's still not finished with me yet. And he's renewing us every single day.

And he's bringing us on every day from glory to glory until we stand in his presence. And finally, one of my favourite verses is in Romans 8, when it says that nothing shall separate us from his love, the love that is in Jesus Christ.

No matter how many times I mess up or how many times I lose my temper, nothing can separate me from God. But that doesn't mean that I just have licence and you have licence to just live our lives, you know, exactly as we want to.

[3 : 39] It's God's love that compels us to live for him. And when we fully grasp how much he loves us, then we're inspired and challenged to live for him, rather than just living for what this world's got to offer.

Because when we've got a glimpse of his love, that's what inspires us. I really want to live for him.

Because actually this world's got nothing for me, but his love is everything to me.

And that's what motivates me anyway. And helps me to serve him. And makes me want to be more generous with my time and with my life. I remember when I was young, I used to love hockey and I

was on the school hockey team.

I wasn't very good at keeping to the rules. I just loved smashing that ball up the field and throwing myself around the field and taking every opportunity to get that ball off my opponent.

We might well have been losing 10-10 and often we were in our team. But we gave everything for that game. And we gave everything because we were passionate about it.

[4 : 42] And we loved it. And we wanted to win. So sometimes I think to myself, I love you God.

And I really want to be on mission for you. But how sometimes do I find it really difficult to give you everything?

That I need to just withhold something. I give you this much, but actually this much. I just need to keep to myself and protect it. And God says to me, no, give me everything. He says to me, when you gave your life to me, Suzanne, what were you giving me?

Were you giving me a Sunday morning or a Bible study? No, when I gave my life to him, I gave my life. And everything with it, I try and surrender to him every day.

And it's this love that encourages me to give everything on that mission field. So now what does it look like to have a generous heart and to live a new generous life?

Over the years, I've learned so much from the people I've worked and lived alongside that have been very generous. And a couple of things that I've picked up are. The first thing, generous people don't just go the extra mile.

[5 : 47] They live there. For generous people, going the extra mile isn't a chore. It's an attitude and a way of life. And it's not like, oh, OK, then I'll go the extra mile with you.

It's how can I help you? How can we go the extra mile together? It's just part of their DNA and their makeup. And it's what they've chosen. And I think it's because they've learned how to count their blessings.

You see, when I start to count my blessings, I see my life and the world differently. And that's not even the material thing that God's blessed me with. Because I'm so aware, actually, that material stuff can just as easily be taken away as given to me.

But the blessings that I've got in Jesus Christ can never be taken away from me. So actually, I'm rich beyond belief. Do you know, I'm sure you probably do, the shocking statistic that even in Britain, if you're the poorest person that lives in Britain, you're still within the top 10% of the richest people in the world.

This is a shocking but a true fact. It no way negates the terrible conditions and the meagre amounts of money that a lot of people are having to survive on in this country at the moment.

[6 : 57] However, even for the most poorest people in Britain, those that are on social welfare, they're still in the top 10% of the richest people in the world.

So we here at Christchurch are truly blessed. And we need to start counting our blessings. Often what happens though, is that we start comparing ourselves to other people. You know, we can look at our car and think that's a bit of a wreck.

Look at the neighbour's car and it's, you know, spanking new. And also we can then also look on the world of like Facebook and Instagram. And we can see the wonderful lives that everybody else are living.

And the wonderful, beautiful things they've got. And the pictures of the wonderful, beautiful things they've got. But do you know what? All those pictures have been filtered to an inch of their life. And they've been airbrushed.

Believe me, people just don't look like that when they get up in the morning. And we look at those people and we think, oh, they've got a great life. And we begin to count our lack. And when we start to count our lack, we're not going to be generous.

[7 : 58] But when we count our blessings, we say, dear Lord, thank you. I'm so blessed. And that makes us want to share our blessings with others. The second thing that I've learned is that people that are generous are outward focused and others focused.

Generosity is being the exact opposite of selfishness. Selfish people are self-focused. They don't see the needs of other people because they're just concentrating on their own needs.

So we need to be others focused. We need to have our eyes fixed on other people and our hearts open and towards other people too. Selfish people are self-serving.

In other words, they will serve themselves. They'll push past. They'll get to the front. They'll have the best of everything. And everybody else, you know, it doesn't matter. We've seen horrible

examples of this last year with films of people rushing into supermarkets and pushing elderly people out of the way so they can strip the aisles, you know, of toilet rolls and food.

That actually then we've seen film footage a few days later of full bins outside people's homes of unopened and unused food. Really shocking. But selfish people don't really care what happens to anyone else.

[9 : 17] As long as they get what they want, that's all that really matters to them. But can you imagine if a little boy that went up the mountain to hear Jesus speaking along with those 5,000 other people was a selfish person?

Can you imagine that when the disciples came to him and found him in this little lunchbox with his loaves and fishes in and they said, can we have that because we want to feed people with it? He'd said, no, I've packed my lunchbox.

You lot should have been much more organized than you are. And all of these people here, frankly, they should have packed their own lunchbox. Off you go. Go and be hungry. What would have happened then? But he didn't do that, did he?

He shared what he got with them. And because of that, miracles happened. Selfish people won't see God's miraculous work in their lives. They won't see God moving in their lives because they're too self-centered.

But people that are generous and live open lives get to see God's miracles. Because that little boy opened up his lunchbox and said to Jesus, Jesus, you can have this.

[10 : 22] It's only small, but you can have it. Take it. God took that and he multiplied it and caused miracle to happen. If we live a selfish life, how can we expect God to bless us?

A bit like toddlers, if we grab onto bits of our life and we say, this is mine, this is mine. God can't bless us. Generous people don't live like that. They live open lives.

Their lives are open. In non-COVID times, their homes are open. Their gifts are open. And their wallets are open. Everything is open. And you might think, if I start living a more open life, aren't people going to take advantage of me?

Are they going to abuse me? Well, maybe sometimes they will. But we don't do it for people, do we? We do it for God. So that is the understanding, I think, that generous people have.

That they realise that if they're going to have a rich and fulfilling life, they have to live it generously. If we're selfish and self-centred and we have the attitude that it's all about me, we're not going to be generous.

[11 : 27] But if we're always looking to be open and to serve others and to put people first, we're going to be more generous. It's not that we've got to be doormats and let people take advantage of us.

It just means we have to be generous. The reading today was from Philippians 2. If you listen to just a few verses from it, it says, So basically, don't be selfish in how you live your life.

And what's vain conceit? Well, I think that means don't show off about what you give or what you do, like drawing attention to how generous you are. Look, everybody, I'm giving so and so this. That's not being generous.

That is just vain conceit. And when Paul says, do nothing out of selfish ambition, but rather in humility, value others above yourselves.

I think here he's saying when you're generous, it doesn't mean you don't value yourself. I think it means you have to value yourself. Christchurch family, you are valuable.

[12 : 48] You are children of God. Wherever you live or whatever part of society you're from, it doesn't matter. Whether you're in charge of a CEO of a big company, whether you're a toilet cleaner or whether you're on benefits at the moment because you've lost your job.

Whatever background you're from, you are a child of God. And you've got immense value because of who Jesus made you to be. And we have to know who we are.

We have to know that we're valuable, not in an arrogant way, but in a confident way. Because when we know who we are and what our identity is in Christ, then we can humble ourselves and we can put ourselves first.

Because actually, if we don't value ourselves, how are we going to value anybody else? And then it continues on with, In other words, the mindset.

It's not an action. Being generous is not just a momentary thing. It's not just a reaction to something. It's not, oh, I just see a need, so therefore I'll react to it. That's not what this is about, I don't think.

[14:00] This is having a lifestyle and an attitude of I'm going to choose to be generous. Having the same mindset as Christ Jesus. And finally, it goes on to say, Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every other name.

Therefore God exalted him. Do you know what happens when we exalt ourselves? When we start to kind of think we're a bit better than others and we start lording it over other people. In my experience, God humbles me if I do that.

And when we humble ourselves, God exalts us. It's an upside down kingdom. God humbles us, I think, because he wants to create his character in us.

He wants to do something deep inside us. And generosity values others above themselves. Generosity humbles itself.

Generosity serves. And generosity is sacrificial. So how do we apply all this stuff? Well, God says that we have to be generous to everybody.

[15:07] Not just to people that we really like and that we really get on with. But does being generous mean that if people treat us badly and like rubbish that we have to just put up with that?

No, it doesn't mean that. But it means that if somebody does treat us badly, that we don't let it determine whether we live our lives in a generous way or not. Because if we do that, then we're just living by their standards and we're being controlled by their behavior.

And Corinthians tells us that we have to decide in our hearts what to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, feeling like we've got to, but as a cheerful giver. So ideally, we don't want to just give like off the hoof, you know, something happens.

Oh dear, we better react to it and give. We need to kind of choose to live our whole lives in a generous way. Now there may be times in an emergency we do give like that and we are generous in that way.

But actually, for each of us as Christians, we need to choose and plan our lives so that we're generous to everyone around us and towards each other.

[16:13] And you might think, oh no, she's going to start talking about finances. And yes, I am a little bit. Giving one off gifts to the church, now don't get me wrong, they are helpful.

If we've got a specific need and we do like a day where we give, you know, a gift day, that's fantastic. But actually, on a monthly basis, it's much more helpful to the church to plan and resource really well the missional and outreach work that we're doing at Christchurch.

By giving a weekly or a monthly amount. Therefore, that way we can kind of sort of see what's coming in and kind of know what's going out. But I'm not just talking about finances.

I'm talking about everything. I'm talking about your gifts and I'm also talking about your words. Are you generous with the words that you speak? It's not just enough not to speak badly about people. But actually, especially in these times, I think it's really important that we use our words to build one up and encourage each other. So maybe send somebody a text or an email or give them a ring.

[17:15] Go the extra mile. And maybe going the extra mile this year might be just ringing somebody up and asking them to go for a socially distanced walk and a chat. Or maybe when things start to get a bit easier to go the extra mile by joining like the welcome team or maybe the technical team.

They've been so vital this year in putting all our services together. Or what about making a massive difference in a child or a young person's life by joining the TLG team or the kids and youth team? What about joining Ross and helping out with a living life to the full course? Or maybe joining me and the seniors ministry dream team, getting involved in that sort of thing.

Or maybe joining Helen and the make lunch team. You know what, I've been so encouraged that over Christmas, the amount of families that I've heard, you know, that were able to receive food packages and were blessed by Christchurch and the volunteers that went and put packages together for them and delivered them to them.

If you're already serving on a team in some way, I really want to thank you so much for volunteering your time and your energy to serve God and Christchurch Clevedon.

[18:28] And if you're not yet part of a team, I'd like you to think and to pray about how you might get involved this year. Even if you're really busy working, maybe just commit something, maybe once a month to serve those around you at Christchurch.

And also for the mission, the wide mission here that he's given us at Christchurch, to reach out, love and make Jesus known in Clevedon. If you call this church your home, then please, please get

stuck in.

So as a people of God, we need to remember that we've saved, we're saved and we're blessed, not just to keep it to ourselves, but to pour it out. As a good friend of mine says, we're saved to serve. It's not about just a Sunday morning. It's not just about the dregs in our wallet and it's not about the small use of our gifts. It's about giving our whole life to him.

So as we finish, I've got a challenge for you all, Christchurch family. I want you to begin today by counting your blessings. Spend a moment beginning to count all that God has blessed you with. [19 : 41] And then pray that God would put people in front of you and beside you that you can love and that you can bless and that you can be generous to. Whether it's in your workplace, whether it's your neighbours, whether it's at college, wherever it is.

Because you see, generosity is contagious. Over the years, I have met and spent so much time with amazingly generous people, most of whom have had hardly any money themselves.

And it's really inspired me and made me want to be more generous with my life. It's a Christchurch family. This year, what are you going to invest your time in?

What are you going to invest your gifts in? And what are you going to invest your finances in?