

Barriers

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[0 : 00] Well, hey, good morning. My name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana. As always, if you'd like to learn a little more about us, you can go to FCCGreensburg.com or you can check out the FCC Greensburg Facebook page.

But hey, we are all about getting into the Word of God, but most of all, letting this Word get into us and truly transform these hearts. Now, today, we are in week number two of our series called Happily Generous.

The message is called Barriers, and we will be in 1 Kings chapter 17. Now, in 1982, Chris Gardner was living in San Francisco.

He was struggling to make ends meet on his meager earnings as a medical equipment salesman. And because of several factors, he and his toddler son ended up living for a year on the streets. He struggled to pay his son's daycare. He stood in soup kitchen lines, and he made their beds wherever they could find safety. They literally slept in flop houses, motels, parks, airports, public transit, even a locked bathroom at the train station.

[1 : 10] Life was incredibly hard as he tried to balance being a good dad and getting himself ahead. And then one day, he just so happened to encounter a well-dressed man in a red Ferrari.

Curious, he asked the man what he did, and the guy replied that he was a stockbroker. Well, from that moment on, this extremely intelligent man had his mind set on that career.

If that was the path that could get him and his son off the streets, that's what he would pursue. So he applied to a training program. He was accepted. He beat out many other driven young men to defy the odds.

He even passed his Series 7 exam on the very first try, became a full-time stockbroker. Things went well. And in time, he went on to establish his own brokerage where he achieved great success.

That's when he wrote his inspiring autobiography of his life story, which then became a movie starring Will Smith in 2006 called The Pursuit of Happiness.

[2 : 15] But here's the thing. While I love stories of people with drive, overcoming the odds to get their family maybe out of poverty, the reality is that happiness isn't automatic with power or success or fame or fortune.

In fact, in this month-long series that we started last week called Happily Generous, we're discovering that the road to happiness is paved with generosity.

And you can be happily generous whether you're considered poor, middle class, or wealthy. And if you take a good look at Hollywood with all the riches, you'll find some of the most miserable people on the face of this earth.

Because true joy is found in knowing and living for Jesus, using every resources that God has entrusted to our care so that we can honor him and build his kingdom.

Now, if you weren't with us last week, we started off this series talking about the truth that generosity is wired into our DNA. We are made to deny idols of power, prestige, position, performance, possessions, that would love to sit atop the throne of our hearts.

[3 : 29] That if we're not very intentional, those things can take control of our lives, and we don't even realize it. And yet they will leave you empty, longing for more.

We were made to note the powerful truth that our God is the ultimate giver. He's the perfect example that he gave his life, innocent life, for our guilty ones.

And we abound in generosity as his image bearers. Now, today, as we continue using the book Happily Generous by Mike Kokoloski as a helpful guide, let's talk about some very practical barriers that keep us from being happily generous.

Barriers to giving, barriers to following Jesus' words in Acts 20, verse 35, where he says it is more blessed to give than to receive.

And although this can be a little bit of a gut punch, I think it's important that we understand the stats. Like Christian Smith and Michael Emerson said in their book, most American Christians are remarkably ungenerous.

[4 : 36] Now, man, that hits us right between the eyes, doesn't it? He says only 13% of evangelicals tithe, the biblical practice of giving 10% of one's income to the church.

Historically, followers of Jesus give in a range averaging 2% to 3% of what we earn. But most dreadfully, he says, half of all evangelicals contribute less than 1% of their total income to church and charity.

Many give nothing. And for followers of Jesus, something's very wrong with that picture. We owe every breath to the great giver. Generosity resides in our DNA.

We are simply managers of his stuff. And we're taught in the word to honor God with our wealth, the first and the best of our earnings. We're taught to use everything, our time, our talent, our treasure, to be generous to others and to bear witness to our faith.

Now, in Luke chapter 6, verse 38, Jesus even says this, give and it will be given to you. A good measure pressed down, shaken together and running over will be poured into your lap.

[5 : 45] For with the measure you use, it'll be measured to you. And I know we have a lot of people listening right now who have taken that step of faith to say, God, I trust you with everything.

And you could tell stories of how God has come through and provided your every need, sometimes in very miraculous ways. His blessings even go beyond money and stuff to really the most important things.

Joy, peace, purpose, hope. But does anyone want to scream out at me right now and say, Preacher, that's all fine and dandy and I'd love to do all these things you're talking about, but it's just so hard in the world that we live in.

Listen, I get it. I live here too on one income as our family has just one income as we made that difficult choice for Bethany to stay home. Life is expensive.

Kids are costly. We're raising three of them right now, right? The most conservative numbers say that it costs between three and four hundred thousand dollars to raise a child to the age of 18.

[6 : 46] That doesn't include college. And then you got the dishwashers and the washing machines and the cars and refrigerators that all seem to break down at the worst possible moments.

You got medical bills and insurance and school supplies that all come rolling in. Oh, and the mortgage is due again. Listen, we're all in the same boat. And yet the Lord says that we can be happily generous putting him first, watching him do what he does best.

Take care of his children. So if you want to turn to 1 Kings 17, that would be awesome. 1 Kings 17. I believe it's the 11th book of your Bible.

So kind of towards the front. Kings comes right after 1 and 2 Samuel, right before 1 and 2 Chronicles. And we're in 1 Kings 17. And here we read about a wicked man named Ahab becoming king of Israel.

At the same time, and even before him, Asa, a godly king, was ruling over the tribe of Judah. Ahab didn't help his cause by marrying the wicked Jezebel.

[7 : 50] And God's word says that Ahab aroused the anger of the Lord more than any of the other kings of Israel before him. He set up idol worship. He persecuted true prophets of the Lord.

And that's when 1 Kings 17. 1 says this. Now Elijah the Tishbite from Tishbe and Gilead said to Ahab. So this is a prophet of God talking to this wicked king.

He says, Now could you imagine as a prophet of the Lord having to tell a wicked king that his actions are bringing drought on the land?

Man, that's not safe, right? That's probably why God has Elijah immediately head east of the Jordan where he got water from a brook. And get this, ravens were bringing him meat and bread every morning and every evening.

God made that happen. And as that drought got worse, that brook dried up. People were starving. And the Lord sends Elijah to get food from a widow of all people. And if you got your outlines today, and you can always go to the YouVersion Bible app, go to events, go to First Christian Church of Greensburg, Indiana, and you can see the outline that way.

[9 : 07] But let's talk about the first of the barriers to being happily generous, to giving. And first is scarcity mentality. This scarcity mentality.

It's this idea that I feel like I don't have enough, so therefore I can't give something I don't feel like I have. And that's what the poor widow in 1 Kings 17 thought too, even though she was way worse off than we are.

Let's start here in 1 Kings 17 verse 8. It says, So sorry, Elijah.

There's not enough bread to share, man. See, her barrier to generosity here is that she's afraid of what might happen. She's envisioning the worst. She's obviously poor.

Just her and a son. Times are tough. But even if you take her at her word, she does have enough for today. But she's looking at the next day. She's presuming she won't have anything tomorrow, thinking this is her and her son's last meal before they just starve away and die.

[10 : 52] Will she die tomorrow? Maybe, maybe not. Probably not if she's going to eat today. But assuming the worst was keeping her from an act of obedience.

Because what did the Lord say in this verse to Elijah? He said, And church, that's a real battle. That's a real battle that all of us face. This widow was looking around at other hungry people living in a famine. Not having enough tomorrow was a real possibility.

But for us in the wealthiest country on the face of the earth, starvation may not be tomorrow. In fact, our dilemma is that I don't feel like waiting an hour to cook something in the oven, so I'm just going to go out to eat.

Or for most of us, our tomorrow might be that we'll have enough for retirement. We don't want to outlive our money. Tomorrow might be the college fund for the kids. Tomorrow might be health insurance.

[12 : 16] And the way to overcome this barrier can be summed up in two words. Daily obedience. For the widow, God had commanded her to feed Elijah. That obedience started today for her, regardless of what tomorrow held.

And God is calling us to be generous today with time, talent, and treasure. What did Jesus say in Matthew 6, 33 and 34? This first verse is our vision statement.

Jesus first comes from this. But it says, But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things, all these needs will be given to you as well.

And then look at this. Verse 34. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. Steve Jones expressed this daily obedience well in a poem where he said, It's not what you do with the million, if fortune should be your lot. But what are you doing in the present with the buck and quarter you got? So the first barrier is this scarcity mentality that all I can think about is tomorrow when God says, Hey, you can trust me.

[13 : 25] I'm going to take care of you. So be obedient today. And then second is what we're calling a distorted mentality. Distorted mentality.

We often have this distorted view of our resources. Kind of like those fun mirrors, you know, at like the fair, where you look in one and it makes you look wider than you are, like a little oompa loompa, like a chunky little oompa loompa, right?

It adds a few LBs in there, right? But then you look into another one and you look extra skinny and you're like, Wow, I wish I could live in that world. Kind of like that, we can have a distorted view of our own stuff and resources.

See, this poor widow told Elijah that she couldn't give him any bread because she didn't have enough to share. She only had a little left for their final meal for her and the boy and then they starve. Now look at what Elijah says next in 1 Kings 17, 13.

Elijah said to her, Now, can you imagine what Satan could have done in this widow's mind when Elijah said that to her?

[14 : 41] Oh sure, you're about to die of starvation. Who cares about that? Just make sure that the big shot prophet has his fill first. Because he's so much more valuable to God than you and your son.

Now, I don't know if she thought that or not. But she has more than she thinks. She has enough for two loaves of bread. One for them and one for Elijah.

Her mentality is distorted. And I think we can become that way too. How many of us have ever opened the pantry or the refrigerator door and said, Hey, we don't have anything to eat.

When are you going to the grocery store? And yet you could probably make 20 or 30 meals with all the ingredients in there, right? What we really mean is that there's not something that I absolutely love or something that won't take some time and some effort to make.

We have a distorted mentality or even a spoiled rotten mentality. I think it's important though from time to time to look at the reality of wealth in this world.

[15:39] So if we line up 100 people that would represent the entire world's population in order of highest income to the lowest. If you earn at least \$30,000 a year, which most people do, in America at least, 95 people are going to stand behind you out of the 100.

If you simply earn \$30,000 a year, a person with \$100,000 income is standing first in line. So what's the point? Not to guilt trip you, but to realize how rich each of us really are simply because we're Americans with blessings we may not even think twice about.

So how do we overcome this distorted view of our resources? Very simple. Jesus first. Elijah told the widow to make him some bread first and then make some for yourself.

So when it comes to our time and our talent, we make sure that we're serving God first. And then he'll bless the rest of those hours multiplying your abilities. And yet what we often see is people do the opposite.

God gets the leftovers. And when it comes to our treasure, we give to God first. And when you do that consistently, you find out time and time again that you have enough resources to take care of you and your family.

[17:00] Someone put this into a math equation that I thought was kind of cool. It doesn't make sense, but it works out every time. 90% plus God equals more.

Or as Proverbs 3.9 says, honor the Lord with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops. Some translations even say with the first fruits of your income.

And I just challenge you as someone who has experienced this myself, honor God first and watch what happens. Put Jesus first and I will promise you that God will take care of you just fine.

And it's not that my word means anything. It's that his word throughout the scriptures tell you this. And then the last barrier to being a happily generous person is the lack of trust mentality.

Lack of trust or even faith. So let's just acknowledge that you're human just like I am, right? Faith can be hard when it doesn't make sense.

[18:03] And faith doesn't always make sense. Trusting God can be difficult when we have our doubts if he's going to come through. And we've all been there. And yet there are so many in our church family who could say, I came to a crossroads.

I didn't really have the money to tithe back to the Lord. But I wanted to. I knew it was the right thing. So I did it anyways. And that 90% of my income plus God, he took it.

He multiplied it. And he provided for every single need. He is faithful to keep his word. And one of my favorite promises comes from Malachi 3.10. And we'll break this down more probably in a couple weeks.

But this is where God says, bring the whole tithe, that 10% into the storehouse. That there may be food in my house. What's he talking about? He's talking about the church where you are fed, where you have your church family, where you get to come together with others and make an impact for the kingdom of God.

He says, bring it into my storehouse. Test me in this, says the Lord Almighty. And see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there won't be room enough to store it.

[19:12] And this poor widow who was about to starve to death experienced the power of obedience to God when it didn't make sense to the world around her. God kept multiplying her supplies and the bread kept coming.

So let's pick up here in 1 Kings 17, 14 through 16. As Elijah has just asked this widow to make him a loaf of bread first before her and her son get it.

A huge step of faith. But watch her step of faith that I just alluded to. Verse 14. For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel says. The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord sends rain on the land.

Now watch this step of faith. I love her obedience. I love her trust. She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah, for the woman and her family.

For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry in keeping with the word the Lord spoke by Elijah. So church, this is a miracle.

[20 : 17] Just like some of you have told me about times where your paycheck didn't equal the bills and suddenly the unexpected check shows up in the mail. Or there's an insurance readjustment.

Or someone says to you, you know, God placed you on my heart to give you this money, so here you go. And Bethany and I have experienced this in our own lives many times.

And as we have sought to put God first in our giving, he has shown up every time to keep his promises. And here God miraculously multiplies this widow's resources so that she, her son, and Elijah had plenty to eat until the drought and the famine were over.

And some of you may be thinking right now, well, wait a second. A miracle? That's not fair. Or Elijah told her she was going to be miraculously provided for, so of course she was happily generous.

If God gave me a never-ending bread bowl, I'd be generous too. And yet I would say to you, are you talking about promises that God shares with you like Matthew 6.26?

[21 : 20] That says, look at the birds of the air, they do not sow or reap or store away in the barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them? And then he says, are you not much more valuable than they? Or what about four verses later in Matthew 6.30?

If that's how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothes you, you of little faith? Or even the verse we read earlier from Matthew 6.33 that teaches us when Jesus comes first, God will provide every single need we have.

You know, Oskar was a German industrialist who is credited with saving the lives of 1,200 Jews during the Holocaust by employing them in his factories in Poland and Czech Republic.

You might ask, well, how did he get away with that? He actually bribed the officials with money and luxury items to shield his workers and keep them safe. By the end of the war in 1945, he had spent his entire fortune in this effort to keep the officials quiet.

And when you consider the risk involved, man, that was an act of courage and love. It could have easily cost him his life doing the right thing. Yet Oskar was consumed with the conviction that he could have done more, sacrificed more, made more money to help more people.

[22 : 36] And I'm sure some of you have already figured out who I'm talking about. Well, Oskar Schindler, and his story is told in the famous movie Schindler's List. And at the end of his life, he wasn't rich anymore.

In fact, he went bankrupt. But God still supplied his needs. In his poor state, he relied on support from a group of people nicknamed Schindler Jews.

The very people he had saved during the war. And it all came back around. And you know what? There are always going to be barriers to living a happily generous life.

There are always going to be excuses for why I can't step out in faith and trust God more. And yet, like Oskar, when we do the right thing, when God comes first in every part of our lives, we have nothing to fear.

Because he will provide in every way. Time, talent, treasure, all of me. God, I give it to you. It's the least I can do as you have lavished your grace on me.

[23 : 37] I want to manage well, God, what you've entrusted to me. And by faith, those barriers crumble. And I can walk in faith, putting Jesus first.

Pray with me. Father, we are just so very grateful for the word of God today. And how you have just used it to speak truth and life into each of us.

I know this is a tough topic that can make some nervous, that can make some clam up, that can feel very convicting. And yet, I love the fact, Lord, that you tell us that you love cheerful givers.

That if our hearts aren't truly embracing what it means to make an impact for the kingdom, that we just leave it in our pocket because you don't want it anyways. So thank you that this isn't a guilt trip.

That this isn't trying to make people feel bad to give. But Father, this is a heart issue where we are truly learning how to be grateful for all that you have blessed us with.

[24 : 44] And we are learning how to make an impact for your kingdom. So thank you, Jesus. You are so good. Your word is perfect. And you have spoken truth into our hearts.

And may these barriers to giving faithfully of our time, our talent, our treasure, may these barriers fade. May we overcome these barriers as we put you first in everything.

Thank you, Jesus, that you always provide. You always meet us in our needs. And everything is taken care of. We pray in Jesus' precious and holy name.

And God's people said, amen and amen. Hey, thank you so much for tuning in today. I have a special favor to ask you. If you are one who listens regularly to this programming, and God's word has just been ministering to your heart, and you have been growing through these teachings that God's word has been bringing, would you do us a favor?

We just love to know what kind of impact this ministry is making. Radio is one where you don't always hear a whole lot. And so feel free to email me at ray at FCC Greensburg.

[25 : 59] And just let me know what God is doing in your life through this word. That would be such an encouragement back to us who are putting this ministry out there. Once again, I'm Ray Sweet from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana.

And I want to give you this invitation. If you've been listening and you have questions about faith, you want to talk about giving your life to Jesus, maybe questions about First Christian Church Greensburg, we would love to answer those for you.

We would love to sit down with you and talk that through with you. So you can reach out to us by calling 812-663-8488. That's 663-8488.

Or once again, my email is ray at FCC Greensburg dot com. Hey, thank you so much for tuning in today. I pray that God's word has just spoken powerfully into your life.

And I hope you have a fantastic week. God bless you.