

Cost of Generosity

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Preacher: Ray Sweet

- [0 : 00] Well, 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, today we are so excited to get into the Word of God, but most of all, let that Word get into us and transform these hearts. Now, the title of today's message is The Cost of Generosity.
- We're in a series called Happily Generous. This is week number three. And today, if you want to go ahead and grab your Bibles, we're going to be in 2 Corinthians chapter 8.
- Now, as you're getting there in the Word, I heard a story about a pastor and a girl that he was dating in college. And of course, he was trying to woo her, so he would bring her flowers like every week, especially roses.
- And as we all know, roses are fairly expensive. So, as you might expect, the girl was over the moon because she loved flowers. And she said, you really do care.
- [1 : 04] You are so generous. At least she felt that way until she found out his part-time job at the funeral home. And when families would leave behind their floral pieces, they were free for the taking.
- So, he would gather up the roses and he would re-gift them to her. And here's two things he learned from her change of heart. Number one, flowers from a funeral home lose their romantic aura.
- And number two, his generosity went out the window because it cost him nothing. Church, welcome back to week three of this month-long series called Happily Generous.
- In the first week, we talked all about this reality that it's in our DNA to be happily generous, to deny those idols that pursue our hearts, to take note of God's amazing generosity, especially what he did on the cross for us, and then even embrace our calling as his image bearers to abound in generosity with our time, talent, and treasure.
- Now, last week, we got real and we talked about some barriers to generosity, thinking that we don't have enough for tomorrow, so why would I share? Having a distorted view of what I have and not realizing how blessed I really am, and even a lack of trust that God will provide.
- [2 : 23] He promises time and time again in his word to take care of his children as we step out and trust him. And then next week, we're going to get real practical for those like me who maybe didn't grow up in church or who just don't understand yet what God's word teaches about being happily generous.
- So we're going to dig into the nuts and bolts of what a tithe is and isn't. What's an offering? Is there a difference between a tithe and an offering? And what does it look like on a consistent basis?
- So if you have a heart to truly honor the Lord in every area of your life, according to what his word teaches, but you just need help with the practical side, make sure you tune in next week.

So please don't miss that. But this week, we're going to talk about the cost of generosity. And I just want to remind you that we are using the scripture-led book called Happily Generous by Mike Kokolowski as a helpful guide in this series.

So if you're one who enjoys taking notes, you can always go to the YouVersion, Y-O-U Version Bible app. If you go to events and then you go to First Christian Church, Greensburg, Indiana, you can see our outline that way.

[3 : 38] You can even take notes off to the side. But let's talk first about this reality that happy generosity costs. It costs us. There is a cost associated with being a faithful steward or a faithful manager for Jesus.

And as the Apostle Paul unpacks the generous deeds of the Macedonian church, he describes the situation this way in 2 Corinthians 8, starting in verse 2.

Look at this with me. In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able and even beyond their ability, entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in the service of the Lord's people.

Now, there is a ministry called Christian Financial Resources that helps churches in several ways. We actually partner with them in a small way right now.

Even back in 2007, they helped us fundraise as we were building the Family Life Center. The author of that book, of the book that we're using in this series, works at CFR, Christian Financial Resources, and so does a guy named Darren Key.

[4 : 59] And he shared a story about his first church capital campaign that he was a part of. That means he came in from the outside, and he helped the church put together a plan to raise money to build a church.

And here's what he said. He said, I met a single mother with three kids. She wanted to give so she could build a new church building and help with that, but her budget was so tight she couldn't find even a spare nickel beyond her regular generous weekly giving that the church still needed to operate.

So she decided to pray fervently for the campaign. One day, her children came home from Sunday school all excited. They had a lesson on sacrificial giving, and they wanted to know how they could sacrifice as a family so other kids could hear about Jesus.

Well, after brainstorming some ideas, they decided the best way that they could come up with extra money would be, what we had at the time anyways, was a cable TV subscription, or you could say satellite, or YouTube, or whatever you have.

But they canceled their TV subscription. They all agreed on this, and over three years, they gave \$1,530. Now, compared to others, that wasn't much, but you know what?

[6 : 13] Their faith truly made a difference. And then Darren Key said this. He said, And I tell that story often when I speak, because I know in every congregation there are people who've convinced themselves that they just can't be generous.

They look at their bank account and say, Nope, no way for me. But there is a way. Jesus made it clear that there's always a way when he told the story of the poor widow who put all she had in the temple treasury.

If ever anyone could have made an excuse, it was that lady. Instead, she chose not to just give, and not to just be generous, but to be radical in her giving.

And then we think about this church in Macedonia that Paul wrote about, and how they were going through a severe trial because of their faith in Jesus. So persecution, like we don't even begin to understand here in America.

And on top of that, they lived in extreme poverty, like we also don't comprehend. And it doesn't say they welled up with depression, or anxiety, or felt sorry for themselves.

- [7 : 14] It says they had an overflowing joy and rich generosity in the midst of all of it. And they insisted on making a difference in the lives of other people.
- FCC, could you imagine the impact that we could make in this community for generations to come if each of us welled up with overflowing joy and rich generosity?
- I think about several generations before us who used to worship at FCC's first location down close to where the police station sits now. We're talking 1840s to 1860s.
- And when this revolutionary transportation called the railroad came through Greensburg, guess where they put down their tracks? Right next to the church building where they still are today.
- So the church prayed, and they ended up purchasing this plot of land on the edge of town that we sit on now and built our current sanctuary in the year 1870. And if you would have told that one of the early ministers, D.R. Van Buskirk, or an early elder, General James B. Foley, that this sanctuary that we currently have our eight o'clock service in would still be a house of worship 155 years later, and that the church with three services has outgrown that sanctuary and two of them, they might not believe you.
- [8 : 33] And yet their generosity that paid off that sanctuary shortly after it was built has impacted each of our lives. They have been a blessing to us a century and a half later.
- Now think about our generosity that may cost us and how we can do the same thing for generations that come after us. Church, let's dream together, okay? It's okay to do that.
- What does God want to do in and through FCC in the next three, five, maybe even 10 years? How can we step out in faith and give generously to impact lives for the kingdom?
- What does radical generosity look like for me, from you, and am I willing to sacrifice in this way? See, just like those poor Macedonians, we may not have much or think that we can really make a difference, but just like Rick Warren said, snowflakes are fragile, but if enough of them stick together, they can stop traffic.
- Now I'm sorry to remind you that winter is coming. And so church, having seen the impact that God has made through this family of believers in just the last five years, I can't wait to see what's coming next.
- [9 : 42] If we will trust His leading, allowing the Lord to use us, willing to sacrifice to help others belong to, believe in, become like Jesus, God is going to use that mustard seed faith in big ways.
- He's going to provide in every way as we step out in faith and trust Him. He is calling us to a life, a sacrifice that bears fruit beyond what we can imagine. See, Romans 12, verse 1 says, therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, so because of God's grace, He's lavished over your life.
- He says to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. This is your true and proper worship. See, Steve Jones said it like this.
- He said to sacrifice means to give up something precious for the sake of gaining a favored outcome. For believers, the favored outcome is living a priceless life that glorifies God.
- When we surrender completely and sacrifice generously, we hold nothing back from the one who gives us everything. It's going to cost something. And then happy generosity second costs less than the alternative.
- [10 : 55] It costs less than the alternatives. See, when it comes to generosity, you can see what it costs you up front. I'm getting rid of a satellite dish. I'm cutting back on fast food, whatever it may be.
- However, choosing to not be generous can cost us so much in the long run, and it may not be so obvious in this moment. See, in Luke chapter 18, verse 18, we read about a rich young ruler looking for an expert's answer to a timeless question.

The ruler asked Jesus this. He says, Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? And I truly believe Jesus sets him up pretty good here. He asked him if he's kept the commandments.

And this man seems like a good guy in the world's eyes proudly claims to be blameless. He's kept those commandments. And that's when Jesus forces the religious and successful man to peel back the layers of legalistic obedience and face the core of his own true nature.

What's verse 22 say? When Jesus heard this, he said to him, You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have. Give it to the poor and you'll have treasure in heaven. Then come follow me.

[12 : 06] And trust me, he wasn't expecting that kind of response. That guy had to be freaked out by this. Jesus basically says, I'll make you a trade. See, Jesus knew his heart.

And you can't make this blanket statement for every person, okay? Jesus knew this guy's heart. And the idol, he knew the idol that occupied his heart. He knew what held him back from truly following the Lord.

And sadly, this guy chose to walk away from being happily generous as he worshiped his money, his power, his stuff, even his title. And I'm telling you, because I struggle with this too, there are many churches full of rich young rulers who have no clue how easily they could be substituted into this story.

So let's do a little heart examination here. What is our obstacle? What's the barrier standing between me and truly experiencing the joy and freedom of following Jesus? Not just flirting with Jesus, okay?

Is it buckets of money or is it something else? Is it family or friendships? Is it social status? Is it my ambitious pride or my stubborn rebellion? Is it worshiping my kids' success, whether that be sports, music, academics, whatever?

[13 : 19] Maybe while chasing the life I think I deserve, I miss the bridge that Jesus wants me to cross. So hear me. Generosity creates and nurtures the very nature of God within us.

Greed and stinginess create and nurture something altogether different. Generosity is a beautiful thing, but greed produces a lot of ugly. How many of you recognize the name Manuel Norier?

Norier or Norier, something like that. He has been one of the best soccer goalies in the world for a while as he inches closer to retirement. He even has a World Cup win with Germany, so he's reached the pinnacle.

He makes about \$22 million a year. Probably about what you make, right? And one day, he was taking a taxi from the club's training ground to his apartment when he left his wallet in the taxi.

Later that day, so it wasn't immediately, later that day, the taxi driver found it. It had his driver's license in it, several credit cards, thousands of dollars in cash, and although his taxi was now 75 miles away from the spot where he dropped it off, this honest man, this taxi driver, covered the cost of gas, drove the distance to return his wallet, and handed it over to his manager.

[14 : 41] Two weeks later, the taxi driver gets a package in the mail that had one thing in it, just a t-shirt of the soccer star. That's it. I mean, no reward beyond a \$20 t-shirt, which basically covered the gas, not even a thank you note, not saying I agree with this, but being underwhelmed by the response, by the reward, this guy trying to survive raising four kids, he went public with the story, and Manuel's reputation took quite a hit because it doesn't matter if you make two grand a year, \$42,000 a year, \$122,000, or \$22 million like Manuel.

You can still have an ungrateful and ungenerous heart. And as most of you know, I grew up in this community. I graduated from North Decatur in 2001, and probably six or seven times during my childhood, our teachers rolled in the giant TV on the cart.

You remember that, some of you? And we watched the original Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory. Way better than the remake. They always make them really dark, okay? But in this movie, based off Roald Dahl's famous book, Charlie Bucket finds the last of the five golden tickets, granting him entrance into Willy Wonka's world-famous and also pretty secretive Chocolate Factory.

Printed on that ticket, it said, tremendous things are in store for you. In your wildest dreams, you cannot imagine the marvelous surprises that await you. But Charlie came from an extremely poor family.

So although he would love to go, he felt it best to his family that he sell the ticket and get some cash to help, to help his family. He'd already been offered \$500. He knew he could probably get more.

[16 : 24] And that's when he says to his family, we need the money more than we need the chocolate. And he wasn't wrong, but thank goodness for Grandpa George's passionate words of wisdom. He said, young man, you come here.

There's plenty of money out there. They print more of it every day. But this ticket, there are only five in the whole world. And that's all there'll ever be. Only a dummy would give up something like this for as common as something as money.

And then he asked Charlie, are you a dummy? Now, forget about chocolate factories, as delicious as that sounds. Would you give up insurance in heaven for something as common as money?

Of course you wouldn't. But going deeper, would we give up something as common as money to feed the hungry, to shelter the homeless, to help a stranger, to support a missionary, to build a church, to save a life, and ultimately express thanksgiving to God?

However costly our gift may seem, they print more money every day. There's a peace and a hope and happy generosity. And I don't want the miserable alternative.

[17 : 28] I don't want to live a miserable life hoarding all my stuff, giving up everything for the sake of my soul. And then last, happy generosity costs nothing compared to Jesus.

Jesus. So, I'm sure that I'm not the only one who does this with his kids, but recently, my youngest, Lila, who's almost five, I will say to her, well, how much does daddy love you?

And she'll spread out her arms as wide as she can, and I'll say, nope, more than that, more than those little arms, and I'll spread out my arms, and I'll say, I love you this much.

And then I'll wrap my arms around her and give her a big hug. And you know what? That doesn't even begin to compare to how Jesus spread out his arms, taking the nails in his hands and his feet to say, I love you big time.

Now, going back to 2 Corinthians 8, but now verse 9, the Apostle Paul says this, Think about the difference between a splinter in your finger and a nail through your hand, or a pint of blood donated at the big red bus compared to all your life's blood draining out of you, or being bullied at school versus being mocked on a cross.

[18 : 49] The God who calls us to follow his lead spared no expense for us. So we have a choice to make. Will we be like the Macedonian church that were excited to make a difference for the kingdom of God that they gave sacrificially?

Or will we be more like the rich young ruler who wasn't willing to give up his riches, and he ended up walking away from the greatest treasure ever because of that pride and that selfishness?

A happily generous life is one that you'll never regret because the alternative will leave you empty. You know, my mind goes to Matthew 16, 26, where Jesus says these words, And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world, but you lose your own soul?

Is anything worth more than your soul? Now, do you remember in 1997 when MasterCard introduced a genius advertising campaign, the first commercial featured a father and son outing at a Major League Baseball game, and we see them enter the stadium and then visit the concession stand, and next they locate their seats as the game is starting.

All the makings of a day to remember for a dad and his son. And then in a gentle monotone voice with a little music behind it, it says two tickets, \$28.

[20 : 06] Two hot dogs, two popcorns, two sodas, \$18. By the way, prices have gone up. One autographed baseball, \$45. Real conversation with your 11-year-old son.

What does it say, anybody? Priceless. There are some things money can't buy. For everything else, there's MasterCard. And you know what? You probably know that commercial, which means they did a fantastic job on advertising.

But you know, the best things money can't buy come from Jesus. In the truest sense of the word, what Jesus did for us is priceless. Conquered the grave. Defeated Satan.

Brought us to himself. Grants us freedom. Offers us rest. Left us peace. Loves us to death. Made us righteous. Prepared a place. Coming back for us.

That's true generosity, church. What Jesus did and is still doing is priceless. And that's why, like we read in Romans 12, that's why we offer our bodies everything we are to worship him.

[21 : 07] Now, I want to share one last story with you today as we close. And over the years, preaching on this difficult topic, I've learned to share a few extra stories in the message because it really helps to bring that message to life.

And I want to share about a Purple Heart recipient named Sam Brown. Sam nearly lost his life in Afghanistan. Only four months, believe it or not, only four months into his deployment in 2008, his Humvee was struck by an IED.

Brown, 24 at the time, was covered in diesel fuel, engulfed in flames. The doctors called it a miracle that he survived, although he did have 30% of his body suffer burns, including his face a little bit.

And as he was on fire, it felt like time slowed down. He realized he was weak and he may not make it through the next 60 seconds. See, like most strong 24-year-old West Point graduates who became Rangers, so quite an impressive young man, he thought that he was invincible, like we all did at that age.

And in some of our eyes, he kind of was. But this moment changed that for him. And as he was on fire, he thought of his need for God and he threw his arms in the air in desperation and even screamed out, Jesus, save me.

[22 : 24] That's when he heard a voice of a fellow soldier immediately say, Sir, I've got you. And now he had hope. He had, he said, throughout his childhood, his family attended church and he learned all about the Bible, practiced the faith of his parents, but never truly made his faith his own until this explosion.

As odd as this may sound, he wouldn't change September 4, 2008. He calls it his alive day. It's the day he was born again in Christ.

The day he came all in, never looking back as his relationship with Christ has grown so much. Now in 1 Peter 1, verses 18 and 19, it says this, For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

And you know what? Maybe today, maybe today can be your alive day where you come to fully understand that the God of the universe loves you so much that he gave his life on the cross to pay for your sins, that he rose from the grave to conquer death and to offer us life on this earth and even life everlasting.

And that through the Holy Spirit, he will sustain you every day. Maybe you can see that that any sacrifices that we make to place Jesus number one in every area of our lives doesn't even begin to compare to the sacrifice he made for us.

[24 : 01] That's simply how we say thank you. And maybe you can see that while we may not be able to do a lot on our own, when we come together in the power of Christ, we can stop traffic, right?

We can make an impact on our world that starts right here in Greensburg, spreads throughout Indiana, to the United States, and to the ends of the earth, just like God's word talks about.

So yes, church, there is a cost to being generous. But I'm going to tell you right now, it is totally worth it as generosity is in your DNA.

Will you pray with me? Heavenly Father, we are just so very grateful for the amazing love that you have shown us on the cross.

Thank you, Jesus, that you loved us this much, that you would give your innocent and sinless life for us, that you would come to this earth and come to this dreary place from the perfection of heaven and live among us and teach us all about the kingdom of God.

[25 : 10] And then, because of pride and control and power, you went to the cross to die for each of us. Thank you, Jesus.

I know you suffered in ways that we can't even understand because you love us big time. And right now, we just ask that we can see that you are the ultimate giver, that it's in our DNA to give generously of our time, our talent, our treasure, that, Lord, you have given it all so we, in response to that, come before you saying, Jesus, my life is yours.

So, Father, I just pray that you will have your way with us, that we will count the cost, and we will be faithful to you in every single way. Thank you.

Thank you for your word. Thank you for speaking to our hearts today, and I pray that you will stir your words that we may be more faithful. We love you, Jesus, and we give you all praise, and we pray in the name above all other names, the name of Jesus Christ.

And God's people said, Amen and Amen. Hey, I just want to thank you for listening in today. Thank you so much. It really is awesome to hear all the people who are listening to God's word, and I just pray that it's been an encouragement and a blessing to you.

[26 : 35] One way that you can return that blessing, we don't ask for anything financially. All we ask for is that you'll just let us know how God is using his word in your life. So here's a way that you can do that.

You can call us, 812-663-8488. That's 663-8488. Or you can email me at ray at FCCGreensburg.com and just let us know what God is doing.

That will just bless us and help us to realize, wow, we are making a difference through the word of God being preached. Also, if you have questions about your faith, or maybe you have questions about First Christian Church of Greensburg, or maybe you want to talk about, hey, I want to give my life to Jesus.

I want to come all in in every part of my life. If that's you, will you do me a favor? Will you give us that call at 663-8488 or email me at ray at FCCGreensburg.com?

We would love to connect with you, start that conversation and walk alongside you on that journey just like others have done for us. So there's no reason to wait. There's no reason to put this off to tomorrow.

[27 : 41] Please reach out to us. We would love to come alongside you and be a blessing to you. So once again, thank you for tuning in to the preaching of God's word.

We pray that you have a fantastic week. God bless you and we'll talk to you again next Sunday.