

# Regular & Sporadic Generosity

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, good morning, everyone. Great to see you. If I've not met you before, my name is Steve, lead pastor here at St Paul's. And you have caught us in the middle of this series or towards the end of this series on rhythms of grace.

And we come to the one which is the one we particularly don't want to talk about in our day and age, and that has to do with money and giving, probably because it's one of the biggest idolatries of our day and age.

It's deeply connected to who we are as people. So let me pray because this one probably tends to be the most difficult one for us to hear.

And as I preach, the tendency will be to listen to the voices in my heart and the voice of society coming up with all kinds of excuses and reasons and justifications as to why we don't need to obey God's word at this point.

So let's pray. Gracious God, you are magnificent. You are worthy of all of our honour and praise. You are the God who has called us, who has made us and called us as your people into obedience to you.

[ 1 : 1 2 ] Lord, you have gifted us with everything good. You are a radically generous God. You are the God who owns all things, and you have called us to be your stewards.

And yet we are existing in a day and age and a culture with hearts that love to build our identity on all sorts of things, but primarily in this day and age on the accumulation of things, of wealth and security.

We love the idea of security. We love the idea of comfort. And so, Lord, challenge us that we might lean into you more and that we might experience your generosity and joy in you more.

So let us hear your word today. We pray for whatever is needed for each heart that is gathered, that you would speak through your word, by your spirit and bring change.

And we ask it for your glory. Amen. It's a well-sighted fact that in the three years of Jesus' earthly ministry, he said more about money and possessions and greed and wealth than he did about faith or sex or family or anything else.

[ 2 : 2 8 ] And that in a day and age, which was when under Roman oppression, where the family unit and the idea of society as a collective unit was prominent in the way that they, in terms of their value system, and yet he spoke more about money than he did about anything else.

One-third of his parables are on the topic of money. Our perspective on money and possessions and wealth and how we handle them, therefore, lies at the very heart of Christian discipleship, which is the concern that we have at the moment for our vision series.

What we do with our resources will influence eternity. And God has recorded in the Bible everything that we need to know about his investment priorities.

What does it mean to be a steward of the resources that he's given us? He's recorded everything we need to know about the high standards he has set for management and the rewards that he offers his faithful stewards.

The New Testament gives us plenty of examples of the good that is done by a life of financial generosity. 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, we see that sacrificial giving is acceptable to God in verses 11 and 12.

[ 3 : 5 9 ] It supplies the needs of others and relieves hardship in verses 14 and 15. It stirs up generosity in others in chapter 9, verse 2.

It enhances Christian fellowship and partnership in chapter 9, verse 14. And it leads to the praise of God in chapter 9, verses 12 to 15. But it is what financial generosity does to our own hearts, our own lives, that is just as important and why we would include it in our list of rhythms of grace,

Christian disciplines, holy habits, that it should be a regular thing that we are constantly practicing to drive the big truths of God down into our heart and out into the way we view the world.

So Jesus connects our hearts and our wealth when he encouraged his disciples to store up for themselves treasures in heaven in Matthew 6.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. And wherever your heart is will drive the course of your life, what your value, what your priorities are, how you behave, what you commit to, what you say yes to day in and day out.

Maybe we also think that the Apostle Paul was using hyperbole when he wrote, the love of money is the root of all evil. The spirit of our age actually prefers Mark Twain's version of that verse where Mark Twain wrote, the lack of money is the root of all evil.

[ 5 : 50 ] Maybe we think Paul was overreaching when he wrote in 1 Timothy 6.10 that an eagerness for money causes some people to wander from the faith, piercing themselves with many griefs.

He must be talking about someone else. He must be clearly talking about the very rich people. How could money be that tightly connected to eternal issues like salvation?

And so we come to Luke 18, James just read out to us, where Jesus has an interaction with a guy who through the centuries has become known as the rich young ruler.

He's rich, he's young, and he's a powerful figure. And in this interaction, there are three things to learn about money and wealth and possessions and the life of generosity.

And you'll see them on the screen. That's our journey today. First of all, the danger of wealth. We see that in the middle of the passage, Luke 18, if you've got your Bibles open at that point.

[ 6 : 57 ] There's also an outline for today on the St. Paul's app if you want to follow along and take notes as we're cruising along as well. So 24, verse 24, Jesus looks right at this rich young man and says, how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.

Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.

Basically, what Jesus is doing here is using a metaphor of impossibility. The camel was the biggest land animal that people knew of that time. The eye of the needle was the smallest hole that they could imagine.

And so it's the impossibility of the rich entering into heaven, into God's kingdom. That's the impossibility.

And when Jesus speaks about rich people here, he isn't referring to people on the Forbes annual rich list in the world, you know, the billionaires.

[ 8 : 02 ] He's referring to people like you and me. When it comes to... It's interesting in our culture, whenever it comes... This is one of the issues because money and wealth and possession is such a key issue for us, is that whenever it comes to wealth, we always naturally look up the line and look to people who are wealthy in us.

And we compare ourselves to people who are wealthy in us. And when it comes to issues of morality, we always look down the line and we look at people who are less moral than us. Either way, we feel better than those people and we're not quite as good as those people.

And so whenever Jesus is referring to issues of morality, well, he mustn't be referring to me. He must be referring to those people. When he talks about the rich, he's clearly not talking to me. He must be talking to those people. And so we let ourselves off the hook on every instance.

So I'm a pastor and my wife is a teacher and I think I've said this before. We saw a financial advisor once and he said to us, you're not giving me much to work with here.

Come back when you've got other jobs or you've got more money to play with. Anyway, so we got rid of him and got another financial advisor. Anyway, so if I get my income and I type it in so you can actually get this website, Global Rich List, where it's not just about the Forbes Rich List, it's where you can put your income pre-tax or post-tax into a website and it will calculate for you where you sit on the Global Rich List.

[ 9 : 41 ] As it turns out, more than 90% of the world's population are poorer than my wife and I based on just income.

Nothing else, just income. 90% of the world's population. That means that if we own assets in a place like Chatswood or our surrounds, then you are way higher than 10%.

In other words, what I'm getting at here is that Jesus may well be having this conversation with you. That's the point that I'm making. It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than it is for us to be right with our Creator God.

Verse 26, the disciples hearing this go, well then, who then can be saved? You see, in their culture, they thought it was the rich ones who were particularly blessed by God.

And so if the rich can't get in, well, who can? And Jesus responds, what is impossible with men is possible with God. Notice Jesus doesn't say, oh, well, look, what is impossible for the rich people? [11:01] It's possible. He actually says, what is impossible for all people is possible with God. That is, the point he's making here is salvation is a miracle.

It is in fact an impossibility, rich or poor, for anyone to be saved because Romans 3 says, all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory.

It's not possible for any human beings to be saved except that God would intervene and do the impossible.

That God would intervene and be radically generous with those who don't deserve it. Now, the reason Jesus raises that here with this rich young man is because the same thing that makes salvation for all of us impossible is made even worse with wealth.

The Old Testament book of Proverbs is a book really, it's about wisdom, it's about how to navigate life in God's world well.

[12:19] And it says two really important, it says lots of things about money, by the way, but it says really two important things about the spiritual power of money.

Not just the, you know, fiscal power of money, but the spiritual power of money. And the first thing it says is that money is distracting. Money has this spiritual power to distract us from what matters most in life.

distracting us from asking the really important questions of so what am I here for? What am I really, what is my purpose in life?

What am I seeking to accomplish in life? Proverbs 11.4 says, wealth is worthless in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death.

What that means is wealth is worthless in the day of wrath, is that money can't help you when the troubles in life hit.

[13:26] And yet it wants to confuse us to think that it can. Because we have this assumption, the more of it we have, the greater level of security we have. It gives us that delusion that we are safe.

But we're never safe. We are never safe from grief and bereavement. We are never safe from illness. We are never safe from disaster.

And ironically, you're never even safe from financial ruin. Money can't stop death. It can't stop tragedy. It can't stop heartbreak. It can't even stop poverty.

And when it comes, we are totally unprepared. Totally unprepared. Money has the power to distract us from the important questions of life.

The other thing it says is that, that is, Proverbs says, it can distort our self-image. So, Proverbs 30, verses 8 and 9 says, Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread.

[14:38] Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, who is the Lord? What Proverbs is saying, and you may be able to see this in your own life, to see a person humbled, growing in humility, under a growth of prosperity, it would have to be one of the greatest rarities in the world.

One of the greatest rarities, that is, the growth in wealth and accompanying growth downward in humility are not connected. Wealth leads to pride.

It leads to pride. It puts me in a place where we say, who is God? I don't need God. Look at me and look at all that I have.

I am a self-made man. And of course, the Proverbs also says, give me not poverty so that I might not shake my fist at God and say, what are you doing in my life, God?

It puts us in a place of who is God? Why do I need God? That's the danger of wealth. So, why is it so dangerous?

[16:06] Let's go back to the beginning of this passage. We're talking about Luke 18 here and unpack it, why it is so dangerous. Verse 18, right at the beginning. A certain ruler asked him, good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

Jesus says to him, why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not murder. You shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony.

Honor your father and mother. All these I have kept since I was a boy, he said. Now, if you're a Christian sitting in the room and you'd know anything about the core message of Christianity, when you read that, you should be shocked.

You should be shocked. You should be shocked that Jesus says to this guy, the answer to his question of what must I do in return, Jesus says to him, go and obey the Ten Commandments. As if somehow that is how you get right with God. Why on earth would Jesus say that to him?

[17:20] Because right before this interaction, Jesus tells the story, another parable, about a Pharisee and a tax collector where the obedient religious man pursuing the Ten Commandments went home not saved, not right with God and the sinner was saved.

The one who lived a life of disobedience was saved. And again and again and again throughout the New Testament, we see it is impossible to save ourselves by being good, by being religious, by being moral.

So why does Jesus not say to this guy in this moment when he rocks up to him, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

Why does Jesus not grab his blackboard and his whiteboard marker and draw him six boxes and run through two ways to live or run through for him the four spiritual principles of life?

Why does he not say to him, I'm on the way to Jerusalem, I'm going to die on the cross to pay a ransom, to take the penalty that you deserve for your sin and if you put your trust in me then you will have eternal life.

[18:50] Why does Jesus not do that? Because that's what's been said for 20 centuries since Jesus. Well, because in this moment to say to this rich young man I've come to die for your sins would be entirely incomprehensible to him.

You see, the rich young ruler at this point is in fact like most people in our society.

The vast majority of people in our neighbourhood are basically good. And to walk in and say you need a saviour is entirely incomprehensible to people in our day and age as it was for this rich young ruler.

See his words, verse 21? All these I have kept since I was a boy. In other words, I don't need a rescuer.

I'm a good person. I might not be perfect, but I don't need a rescuer. You know, when I look at the people down below me in the chain of morality, I am so much better than the vast majority of people.

[20:19] all I need here from you, Jesus, is just a little bit of a push, just a little bit of assistance, just a little bit of guidance to ensure that I get over the line in the end. And yet, he still comes running up to Jesus.

Despite the life that he has lived, deep down, he wasn't entirely confident. He knew he wasn't entirely right.

Something's wrong, something's missing. Why would he ask the question about securing eternal life if he thought that he had had it secured through his morality?

If we think we can get right with God by being good, we'll always feel insecure. Have I done enough?

Am I doing enough? Even those who project an image that they've got it all together on the outside, on the inside, they know better because in the deep recesses of the heart that no one else sees day by day, there is that dark corner that we hope no one will ever see.

[21:36] We know the things that we've done and the things that we've thought that we could hide, but we cannot hide them from our own conscience. Jesus is reminding this young man that his first and fundamental problem is that he is in fact not good.

That's where he had to go. No mere mortal is. What's the point of verse 19? Jesus then goes on to show him exactly where he is not good. In verse 22, when Jesus heard this, he said to him, you still like one thing, sell everything you have and give to the poor and you'll have treasure in heaven and then come follow me.

What's Jesus doing here? Again, what is he doing? I mean, he has never suggested to anyone that the way to be saved is to give all of your money away to the poor and become poor yourself.

He's never suggested that. So why now? Why now? Because it is a brilliant strategy to help this man see his heart and where he needs a saviour.

You see, what Jesus does here is he targets his deepest sense of security, his deepest identity marker, his idol.

[ 23 : 02 ] This is the thing that he's looking to, to give him what only God can give him. You see, for this rich young ruler, money is not just some tool for him, it is, in fact, an identity scorecard.

It is his security, it is his hope. This is the thing that is, in fact, squeezing God out of his life. And when Jesus presses in on him, he sees for the first time in his life that he hasn't, in fact, obeyed the Ten Commandments at all, that he's not, in fact, good at all.

Jesus pushes him to give it all up for the poor, give it all up, in other words, give it all up for God and follow me, follow Jesus.

And he couldn't do it. He couldn't do it. Verse 23, it says, he became very sad. The words say, he is deeply grieved.

He is deeply distressed. What is he deeply distressed about? He's deeply distressed because for the first time in his life, he has understood good that he is in fact not good.

[ 24 : 40 ] You see, his money is just a means to an end for him as it is for any of us and his money is not just money for him, it is his worth, it is his hope, it is his security, it is in fact his greatest treasure and he does not want God to get in the way of that and he understands for the first time in his life that he has not obeyed the Ten Commandments at all because he has not even got past the very first one.

You shall have no other gods but me. It wasn't until Jesus took him to you shall not covet and because coveting of all the Ten Commandments coveting is the one that's an attitude of the heart not an action.

It's an attitude of the heart and the attitude of the heart has now been exposed in such a way that he's understood that God is not his greatest treasure.

Of all the things that Jesus could have picked on let me just land this for us for a little bit of all the things that Jesus could have picked on he sets up money as the alternative God when he said you cannot serve both God and money.

We are devoted to one or the other but you cannot have both. You'll be mastered by one or the other. You will never be mastered by both. So how do we escape the danger of money?

[ 26 : 27 ] Jesus the rest of the Bible tells me that wealth money materialism is incredibly dangerous. It's one of the major distractions for those who follow Jesus and I would add it's one of the I would say it's got to be close to one of the most primary distractions in the 21st century in Western civilization distractions in terms of following Jesus.

Now I've got three things we can do to guard against the hazard of wealth while also maximizing the helpfulness of wealth and money.

The first thing is to assume that we're in denial. That's the helpful thing. You start there. Assume that you're in denial. You and me we're all in denial here because Jesus is entirely blunt because that's what this rich young ruler was.

He was entirely in denial and that is in fact the very nature of addiction. And addiction will constantly say I'm not an addiction.

I'm not addicted to this thing. I don't have a problem with this thing. So assume that we're in denial because the dominant philosophy of our time is what is known technically as philosophical naturalism.

[ 27 : 51 ] That's the world view. That's the dominant world view of our day and age. Philosophical naturalism. It's what a secular age is built on. And what it does, philosophical naturalism asserts that there is nothing beyond the natural world.

Nothing beyond the natural world. And the common term that we use for it is materialism. And the goal of materialism, of philosophical naturalism is if there's nothing beyond this world, then the goal of life is to consume as much of this material world as possible.

As possible. To make life as joyful and as happy for you as possible. And so, if you're one of the older generations, baby boomers and above, the whole goal for you has been, you've inherited it from your parents and your grandparents who came through World War I and World War II, is to have financial security in life.

Until you get almost to the end of your life, and then you blow it all on tours and trips and comforts and leather lounges that get to your body temperature and bigotiva, it's all comfort and security. If you're one of the younger generations, you go, screw that, I want it now, and with the benefit of credit and everything else, I'm going to live the high life now, but mainly so you splurge on your resources and accumulate experiences in life.

[ 29 : 40 ] So one generation is financial security, another generation is experiences, and it's all coming from philosophical naturalism. Now, the goal here, if you like, assume that you're in denial, on this.

You see, in this country alone, \$20 billion is spent every year keeping us marinating in the materialism worldview.

\$20 billion just in this world, in this country, which, by the way, is vastly more than what this country gives annually to charities and non-profits.

So the first thing to assume is that you are under the influence of that very well-spent \$20 billion to get your life aligned with philosophical naturalism as a philosophy.

Assume that some of the message is having some level of impact on you. Assume that the amount of money you think you need is more than what you really need.

[ 30 : 50 ] And assume also that the amount of money you think you can give away is in fact less than what you really can give away. The Bible tells us that money makes us blind.

So assume you're in denial. Secondly, look to the rich young ruler. To counter the constant messaging of our society, look to the rich young ruler as an example for us.

And when I say that, you need to hear me this, I'm not referring to the guy that's in front of Jesus, talking to Jesus. I'm referring to the other rich young ruler in this passage.

Jesus is around 30, 32 when he was heading to Jerusalem to die on a cross. The Bible says that he existed with God for all of eternity. He's the one who made everything.

He's the one who owns everything. He is the one who rules and sustains everything. And he left all of that aside and came from heaven to identify with the spiritual poverty of humanity.

[ 32 : 08 ] And he's on the way to Jerusalem to die on a cross and into a physical and a spiritual and an emotional poverty deeper than any other human being has ever gone on the face of the earth.

He will be stripped of everything. The one who is rich beyond all measure will be stripped of everything.

and he does it for us. 2 Corinthians 8 verse 9 puts it in economic terms for us the gospel of Jesus Christ.

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich yet for your sakes he became poor so that you through his poverty might become rich.

he was drained of all riches so that we though spiritually bankrupt beyond measure can receive his riches.

[ 33 : 26 ] You see in Jesus we get adoption into God's family we get forgiveness we get pardon we get eternal life. It is the only wealth that makes you truly secure not just in this life but beyond life we get the affirmation of the eternal God the praiseworthy says you are my much loved child in Jesus.

It's the only security that this world cannot take away. The only identity and so the second thing is we need to look to the rich young ruler until we get weepingly excited over what he has achieved for us what he has gifted to us look to the glorious news of God's grace and his riches to us in the Lord Jesus until it drains us of all power of all the power of money and possessions let me just swing this back to what I wanted the earlier message if you are not in God's word and meditating on his word and experiencing day in and day out the wealth of what you have in Christ and pushing that down in your heart if you are not doing that daily then you must assume that you are in denial because you are marinating in 20 billion dollars worth of advertising and it is winning the war against your soul if you are not daily in his word then the messaging of our society and where you get your security identity is most definitely winning and so look to the glorious news of

God's grace and these riches to us in the Lord Jesus until it drains all power out of money and possessions it just becomes money and things it's no longer my security or my identity and so the third thing is to have a plan to use your wealth with purpose to use it with eternity and as stewards of God's resources resources while you have them so here's a couple of steps for you step number one take the time to investigate how much am I actually giving away at the moment based on my wealth how much am I giving away and how much of that is going to Christian ministry and charity

Christian ministry to help people out of spiritual poverty charity to help people out of physical poverty step number two if it is not at least 10% and this is not a sermon on tithing which is the biblical mark here if it's not at least 10% the very least amount the disciples are the giveaway work out how you can start moving aggressively towards 10% step number three work out what sacrifices you are going to make in order to get there as I said

I think it was last week if we don't need to make sacrifices to give 10% then we aren't actually giving enough radical generosity is about sacrifice sacrificial giving is not a percentage it's when our living standards change in such a way that we feel loss for the benefit of others if our giving does not burden us if it does not cut into our lifestyle in any way then you need to give more American pastor John Piper argues this point very strongly I didn't put it on the screen I just want to read it to you just let us sit it is a biblical truth beyond all dispute!

there's a biblical worldview here you've received everything you have including the ability to make the money that you have and has been loaned to you as a steward to use in ways that maximize the glorification of God's mercy in the world Matthew 25 verses 14 to 30 and it is irrational to think that giving 10% of that money to church settles the issue of good stewardship in a world of such immense need and in a country of such immense luxury and under the commission of such a powerful Lord the issue of stewardship is not should I tithe in other words should I give just 10% but rather how much of God's trust fund dare I use to surround myself with comforts step four decide what you are giving to and follow through with it make yourself accountable that is the reason we say that is that giving is a spiritual issue and like all spiritual issues we are accountable for it step five set aside electronically your regular gift to the church and then on top of that you add spontaneous gifts like the projects that we're doing at the moment and other needs as they arise [ 39 : 24 ] I take my cue here from the apostle Paul's teaching that giving should be two things it should be regular and it should be spontaneous it should be disciplined and it should be free 1 Corinthians 16 2 what it does here it points to the wisdom of planned regular disciplined giving and that's what these whole rhythms of grace is about it's about in and out in and out in and out it's a rhythm and habit of life as our income comes in rhythmically so we send it out rhythmically if it comes in rhythmically and I'm not sending it out rhythmically there's an indication there that I'm probably more captivated by the values of the world around us sporadic giving with no plan will most likely mean that we're not treating finance as an integral part of our discipleship to give radically generous lives with our money sorry to live radically generous lives with our wealth and possession actually needs joy we need more than just courage we need joy we need to be relaxed and at peace and secure enough to do it and this joy in radical generosity only comes when we look to the rich young ruler it's the only source of it it only comes when we look to the rich young ruler who lost absolutely everything so that we could gain absolutely everything and the more we look to Jesus and the riches we have in him the freer we will be to live pervasive and generous lives rhythmic financial giving is a spiritual discipline that takes the knowledge of

Jesus' generosity to me my created God's generosity to me in the gospel it takes that knowledge in the head and it pushes it down into my heart it takes the knowledge that Jesus is in fact my greatest treasure and it pushes it down into my heart and the way it pushes it down into my heart is by being regular and sporadic with the other greatest treasure in my life by giving it away in eye popping proportions