

## **All In – Making our Passion Practical (Part 2 of 4)**

### **Generosity: Living With An Open Hand**

1 Corinthians 4:1-7; 2 Corinthians 9:8-12

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*<sup>8</sup> And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. <sup>9</sup> As it is written, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." <sup>10</sup> He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. <sup>11</sup> You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. <sup>12</sup> For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. 2 Corinthians 9:8–12 (ESV)*

When it comes to the subject of generosity, my mind immediately goes to one particular story. I think it helps to give me a picture of how God must look at us when we are talking about this.

This first story happened at my last church. We were in the middle of a capital campaign. Our people had pledged a particular amount, but over a period of six months, as we waited for the cash to come in so that we could start, the cost of construction was dramatically increasing. Our bids were coming back much higher than what we had anticipated, and it was clear that there was too big of a gap between our commitments and our costs. Our options were not good. We would either have to reduce the size of the project beyond its usefulness, violate our commitment to build completely debt-free, or ask our people for more money.

The Leadership Team decided that we needed to let our people be a part of the challenge, and so we shared the situation and the challenge with them. We told them that we needed significantly more money to be pledged for the project to work. We took a few weeks to pray.

During that time, a church member asked to meet with me. While in his office, he shared with me that he felt the Lord leading him to be sure that we didn't cancel the project. He said, "Mark, work hard to invite the church to give. And whatever is left, I'll take care of." I couldn't believe it.

I remember driving home from his office, and my heart was so excited to invite our people to be generous, not because of the money that was needed, but because I knew that we were going to get there, and I wanted them to be a part of it. I was motivating them to be generous because I didn't want them to miss out on the celebration of what I knew was going to happen. And I thought, "That is how God must view us when it comes to our generosity."

## Stewardship and Generosity

We are taking four weeks for a series called “All In – Making our Passion Practical,” where we are examining the ideas of stewardship, generosity, time, and money. We are talking about foundational biblical principles related to stewardship which apply to everyone and in many more ways than you probably imagine. The aim of this series is not what I want *from* you but *for* you!

Last week we examined the foundations of stewardship from the Genesis 1-2, and we saw the importance of four key points:

1. God is the **Creator** and the owner of everything. I need to watch out for an “owner attitude.”
2. God created men and women in His **image**. There is a divinely given value in what we do when it’s done well and for God’s glory.
3. Stewardship means taking real steps and **actions**. Stewardship is not theoretical; it’s practical.
4. God has given us **gifts** that are to be used. I need to see God’s provision of these gifts the right way and then be committed to using them in a way that fits with His plan.

So, did you think differently about anything this week? How often did you think like a steward versus an owner? Did it help you to put away laziness or perfectionism? Did you hold things – like your home, your career, your plans, or your money – a little more loosely?

I heard from a number of you this week through email or on social media. I’ve received some devotions, songs, and texts about how you are processing this all-encompassing theme. Let’s keep doing that, especially in Small Groups as you meet and help one another apply these biblical truths. Remember that personal application and life change happens best when it involves others!

This week we are taking the next step in our journey together by connecting the biblical principle of generosity to the foundational principle of stewardship. They go together. Think of them like step one and step two or like the first two rings of the circle around “All In.”

Understanding that you are a steward should then lead you toward faithfulness and selflessness. And when you add in the dynamic of the gospel, this becomes even more important.

Let me show you how this works in two places as Paul wrote to a New Testament church in the city of Corinth.

### The Call of Faithfulness

We are going first to 1 Corinthians 4 in order to see some of the implications for stewardship and then connect this to generosity in 2 Corinthians 9, another letter that Paul wrote to the same church.

To understand this passage, you need to know a little about the situation that Paul was trying to address. The city of Corinth was a major hub in modern-day Greece between the trade routes of the East and West. It was a thriving port city and cultural center. The city was marked by wealth, intelligence, artistic creativity, and immorality – much the same as you would think of any major city around the world today.

The challenge, however, was that this culture had spread into the church that was planted in the city of Corinth. They were characterized by pride, divisions, and a misuse of spiritual gifts. They divided themselves into various groups based upon their favorite apostle, they were guilty of quarreling, and they even were sinfully critical of the apostle Paul's ministry.

The people at Corinth were full of themselves and in love with their gifts. They thought that they were the "bomb.com" if you know what I mean. It affected how they treated one another, and it required Paul, in 2 Corinthians, to say some important things about generosity.

When Paul speaks to them here, he asserts that stewards need to have a particular mindset related to the issue of faithfulness.

First, he specifically instructs them to consider all their spiritual leaders as servants and stewards. They were projecting on them more than what was appropriate, and Paul is trying to help them reset what they see or think. The word "regard" has the sense of how a person views or assesses another person. He wants the church to have a biblically informed view of Apollos and Paul. He uses the word "servant," which originally referred to an "under-rower," the kind of servant stationed on an oar in the belly of a ship.<sup>1</sup> And he uses the word "steward," which referred to one who administers the affairs of a house. It is a combination of two Greek words for house and administrate or manager.<sup>2</sup>

Notice that Paul had the right view of himself, and he refused to allow other people to see him as anything more or less. You need to understand the nature of stewardship clearly, not only for yourself but also for the sake of others and how they think of you, especially if you have many gifts.

Second, verse 2 identifies that the main priority for stewards is faithfulness. Other translations translate this as *trustworthy*, so I think you get the sense that it means one who carries out the desires of another in an appropriate way. Faithfulness and stewardship are closely tied together. An unfaithful steward is nearly an oxymoron. Failing at faithfulness is to fail at being a steward. What decisiveness is to a judge and creativity is to an artist, so faithfulness is to a steward. It is the main thing that one must do to fulfill the role.

Now let me ask you something: How does faithfulness sound to you? Is faithfulness something that motivates you and strikes you as important? Honestly, my first reaction when I hear "faithfulness" is not a very positive one. For example, if I'm meeting with a pastor, and I ask him, "How's the ministry going?" and he replies, "Well, I'm being faithful," that would not initially be a good thing to me. Now I'm not saying that is right, but I'm not sure that we value faithfulness as much as we should. There are other words that are more exciting, like *aggressive, enthusiastic, strategic, innovative*, etc. You get the point.

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<sup>1</sup> Spicq, Ceslas and James D. Ernest, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 398.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 568.

Could it be that we have a subtle ownership issue or pride issue as it relates to what we do? Do we see ourselves, our things, our careers, our homes, or our gifts as something that demands faithfulness more than anything else? Stewards are called to be faithful.

But why? In verses 3-5 Paul talks about a coming day of accountability – a day of judgment. According to verse five, this day will be connected to the Lord Jesus' return and will involve three things:

1. Things that are hidden will be made clear. What is private will be public.
2. Motivations will be revealed. Why we do what we do will be in play.
3. Rewards will be distributed. Yes, future rewards are a part of the equation.

Don't miss this, because it plays into generosity in a minute. Stewardship, faithfulness, and the future are all tied together. The faithful steward lives his or her life keeping an unseen, hidden, future agenda in mind. In other words, the person who is *All In* lives not for the temporary but for the eternal, not for what is perceived but for the motivation of his heart and with the knowledge that God knows all about it.

So, mark it down somewhere in your mind: Stewardship and generosity are all about your heart and what you think about the future.

Now this applies to everything related to what God has entrusted to us. In the context of 2 Corinthians 9, Paul is using this argument to tamp down the proud divisions. But realize that they have a stewardship problem and a generosity problem in the way that they are treating one another. And on top of it all, they are proud!

That is why Paul says, "What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?" Stewards are called to live faithfully in light of who they are.

So as we transition into the specifics of generosity, I just need you to realize that how we handle gifts says a lot about what we think about ourselves. Everything in life has the potential to become a mirror for our own reflective glory. In Corinth, they were dividing themselves up into camps as they used the gifts of Paul and Apollos to say something about themselves. But it doesn't stop there, does it?

Our gifts, our toys, our technology, our abilities, our homes, our careers, or our cars can all become the latest status symbols, when the reality is that they don't belong to us. We are borrowing someone else's stuff. When it comes to how you see yourself, you are not a guy bringing home a new car. You are a guy picking up a girl for prom in your grandpa's car. We are stewards, not owners. And God calls us to be faithful.

### **The Grace of Generosity**

Faithful is how stewards are to live. But that is not the only thought. The next step involves responding to the grace of God by being gracious or generous.

The context of 2 Corinthians 9 is a very specific request for an offering that Paul was collecting for the Jewish believers in Jerusalem who were struggling under the weight of a famine. Paul had previously

visited the Macedonian region, a very poor and struggling area. They gave very sacrificially, and Paul uses their gift as a motivator for the Corinthians to give. 2 Corinthians 8-9 is all about what it means to give generously in the light of the grace of God.

According to 2 Corinthians 8:7, the Corinthian church excelled in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in their love for him. And he wanted them to excel in the grace of generosity as well. So, how did Paul motivate them? If you understand that you really are a steward, what becomes the motivation? Let me highlight four thoughts taken out of 2 Corinthians 8-9.

### **“God was gracious to me”**

In 2 Corinthians 8:9 Paul anchors what he says about faithful generosity in the sacrifice of Jesus. He says “you know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor.” So Paul reminds them (and us) about the immeasurable gift that we have been given and the example of Jesus.

The beautiful story of the gospel is that God rescued the poorest people in the world – spiritually dead people. And he did so through the most costly demonstration of love – the sacrifice and death of Jesus. Paul uses the example and sacrifice of Jesus as the basis for his appeal. So it is not just that God is the owner, but it is also that God was lavishly and eternally gracious with us. That is why 8:8 talks about proving one’s love, because how they responded to this appeal would say something very important about their love for other believers and their love of the gospel.

In 9:7 Paul talks about a cheerful giver and how God loves that. Do you know why God loves a cheerful giver? It is because cheerfulness indicates that you really understand God’s grace. It means that you have been so struck by the generosity of God that you are compelled to give.

Here is my definition of generosity: a gospel-wrought affection that motivates and moves me to act in a selfless way. Generosity flows out of a heart that knows that God has been generous to you. When you understand and love the gospel, you are less inclined to curl your fingers.

### **“God will help me”**

The second way that giving connects with God’s grace is the way that you live by believing in God’s grace as you give. Whenever you give something away, you are creating a gap in your life. And that means that whatever you had can no longer help you. When your money is given away, you have less of it for something that you might need in the future. But notice the amazing promise in 2 Corinthians 9:8.

*<sup>8</sup> And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. (2 Corinthians 9:8)*

This is one of my favorite promises in all of the Bible because it is one of the most practical and one of the most powerful. Paul is promising here that even though there is a gap that is created by our giving, God is able to give us grace so that we will have exactly what we need! Notice all the all’s: all

sufficiency, all things, at all times. This verse promises that you will never lack in what you really need to abound in every good work.

You see, money, possessions, status, and anything that we think we “own” has the power to satisfy us or convince us that we need it. That thing may promise status, security, safety, or pleasure. But this verse promises that God will fill in the gap with His grace. And so the battle for generosity is not just about stewardship; it is also about affection. If I love God’s grace, then I will give.

### **“God can provide for me”**

The third promise and motivation is found in verses 9-10, where Paul quotes from Psalm 112 about God’s lavish distribution. The idea here is that when you give, you are banking your future on God’s ability to provide for you.

It demonstrates that we really do believe that God controls our future, our career, our retirement, and the needs that we have. It means that we believe that God has an infinite ability to meet our needs. Verse ten reminds us that God is able to both supply and multiply your seed.

Now this does not always mean that God is going to automatically pay you back or give you more. He certainly is able to do that, and I’ve seen God do that many times. The idea here is that God is able to provide for you. And giving stakes its claim that my trust is on a God with infinite resources.

That reminds me of a story from our family a few years ago. I don’t remember exactly what the need was, but there was some appeal made known to our family for a missionary. And it landed really heavily on one of our kids’ hearts. He was about age 10, and he had saved up some money. Without us knowing, he gave all of his money to the missionary. A few weeks later we were getting ready for vacation, and we told each of our kids that they needed to be sure that they had their own spending money. When we said this, that son had a really sad look on his face. It was clear that he was struggling.

We took him aside and said, “What’s wrong?” He tearfully replied, “I don’t have any money.” We were alarmed, and I was, frankly, upset. “Well,” I said, “what did you do with all your money? Just a few weeks ago you had plenty of money.” I assumed that he spent it. With quiet tears he said, “I gave it all away to missionary offering.”

Well, Sarah and I burst into tears, hugging him because we were so proud of him. And then I said, “Look, that was awesome. And Mom and I will gladly give you plenty of spending money for our trip. We’ll take care of it. Mom and Dad have plenty of money.” And I thought, “That must be how God views our generosity.”

So, are you going to place your trust in your money, your boss, your company, your 401k, your business plan? Or are you going to place your trust in the one whose wealth and resources are beyond your wildest dreams?

### **“God will be thanked”**

Finally, 2 Corinthians 9:11-12 also identifies that generosity does something really special. It creates thanksgiving to God. It works like this: you give something that meets another person's needs, they see the hand of God in that gift because it met a need, and they thank God. So your giving actually creates gratitude to God. You have created the opportunity for God to be honored and glorified.

Now, if you love the glory of God, this serves as a wonderful motivator. People might ask, "Why are you so generous?" And it creates a beautiful moment where you are able to turn their attention back to God. This is how generosity and the gospel are directly connected.

What kind of people are so weird that they would give money away in order to create gratitude to God? The answer, of course, is the kind of people who have been captured by the gospel. I love what David Mathis says:

*One of the effects of the gospel going deeper into our souls is that it frees our fingers to loosen their grasp on our goods. Generosity is one of the great evidences of truly being a Christian.<sup>3</sup>*

So can I ask you to do some personal inventory again this morning?

- If you are not yet a follower of Jesus and you haven't received the gospel, you will not be able to understand the beauty of being generous until you've experienced the generosity of God. Why not come to Christ today? Ask someone near you or who brought you about the gospel today.
- Is there a particular category in life where you struggle to curl your fingers? Is there something that gives you a sense of safety, trust or comfort that you have hard time letting go of? Do you know that the Lord knows about it, and about so much more? Why not confess it to Him today?
- As you think about generosity, where is your heart on this subject? Is it guarded, resistant, or afraid? Are you a cheerful giver? Why not ask God today to help you reconnect your generosity with the beauty of the gospel?
- When it comes to generosity, I would imagine that there are a number of you that would be really helped by doing something generous this week. Make someone a meal, put \$50 in your pocket and ask the Lord to lead you to give it to someone, or pray over your schedule for the day and ask the Lord for grace in the interruptions. Or maybe you know that generosity is not a part of your life. If people knew what you didn't give this last year, you'd be embarrassed. Why not take a step and start giving? Start small if you have to. But start. You'll be surprised how much joy it brings and how it confirms that you really believe in God's grace.

God calls stewards to be faithful, and He calls graced people to be generous. What do you have that you didn't receive? The answer, of course, is nothing. If that is true, and if the gospel has changed our lives, then the deeper we press into the gospel, the more open our hands become.

Generosity means living with God in view as I open my heart and hands.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/generosity-the-open-hands-of-the-gospel>

## **Resources**

### **BOOKS**

***Master Your Money*** by Ron Blue & Jeremy White (foreword by Charles Swindoll)

***Your Kids Can Master Their Money*** by Ron & Judy Blue

***Your Money After the Big 50*** by Larry Burkett & Ron Blue

***The Law of Rewards*** by Randy Alcorn

***The Treasure Principle*** by Randy Alcorn

## **Next Steps**

### **1. Attend God Owns it All class (North Indy)**

SUNDAY, MAR. 19 - APR. 9, APR. 23 & APR. 30 // 11:30 // CHAPEL C  
BOOK COST: \$10

This 6 week study will give you the opportunity to wrestle with and answer heart-related questions about the Bible and money. You will be confronted with foundational questions about money like:

Who owns it?

How much is enough?

Will it continue to be enough?

Register at [yourchurch.com/godownsitall](http://yourchurch.com/godownsitall)

For info on Fishers Campus future class offerings, contact Dustin Crowe: [dcrowe@yourchurch.com](mailto:dcrowe@yourchurch.com)

### **2. Schedule a Financial Discussion with our Counseling team (All Campus)**

Financial Counselors are available at College Park to discuss your concerns with budgeting, savings, retirement and debt management.

Find out more at [yourchurch.com/counseling](http://yourchurch.com/counseling)

If you have any questions about these resources or any additional resources contact Mark Schuitema at [mschuitema@yourchurch.com](mailto:mschuitema@yourchurch.com).