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LIVING A GENEROUS LIFE

40 Days of Community, Part 6

based on thoughts by Rick Warren

sermon by Matt Hook

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For the past six weeks we've been in this series on 40 Days of Community: How to deepen the sense of community within our church family and within the community around our church family.

The word for "community" in the Bible is often translated as "fellowship." Now I confess: I used to think "fellowship" was a lightweight word for those of us on the more social pathway to God. But the word for "fellowship" in the Bible is the Greek word *koinonia*, and it's an extremely deep word, rich with meaning. (No more lightweight thinking for me!) *Koinonia* does mean fellowship, but it also gets translated as community, participation, contribution, and generosity. All four of these are essential elements of fellowship. Philippians 4:15 "*You became my partners in giving.*" That phrase "partners in giving" is one word in the Greek. It's the word *koinonia*. Then in Hebrews 13:16 "*Keep doing good and sharing your resources.*" That phrase "sharing your resources" is the word for "community" – *koinonia*. Then 2 Corinthians 8:4 "*They begged us to let them have the joy of giving their money for God's people.*" That phrase "joy of giving their money" is actually the word for "fellowship." It's another word for *koinonia*. 1 Timothy 6:18 "*Be generous and willing to share.*" That phrase "willing to share" is just one Greek word: *koinonia*.

We can't have community without generosity. Karl Menninger, the famous psychiatrist of the Menninger Psychiatric clinic said this "Generosity is one of the essential components of mental health. We have found that generous people are rarely mentally ill." Why does God want us to learn to be generous with each other? Because God wants the best for us. There are great benefits to my life when I'm generous with other people.

1. Generosity creates community. 2 Corinthians 9 tells us "*Your generosity... not only provides for the needs of God's people, but also produces prayers of thanksgiving to God.*" When we're generous with each other, we thank God for each other and we're drawn closer to each other.

In Matthew 6, Jesus says "*Your heart will be wherever your treasure is.*" In other words, wherever I put my time, my money, my effort, my energy, wherever I invest myself that's what's going to attract me. My money tends to be a magnet. In other words, if you want to get a heart for Microsoft, buy some stock. Real simple. The moment you buy some stock in Microsoft you'll be very interested in that company. It's the same for any investment, and it's the same with the people around you. Your generosity creates connection and community.

Wherever you put your time and money, that's where your heart is. That's what Jesus said. For many of you, your heart is in your boat. That's where you're putting your time and money and energy. Or your heart may be in your home, or cottage. That's where you're putting your time, your money and your energy – fixing it up. Or your heart may be in your work. That's where you're putting your time, your money and your energy. Or it may be in a hobby. Wherever your treasure is your heart's going to be there.

So anytime I'm generous with you or I'm generous with the poor or I'm generous with anybody – including

God – that’s where my heart tends to go. And every time I give to God it draws my heart closer to God. Every time I give to you it draws my heart closer to you. Here’s a “trade secret” pastors have picked up on: (Don’t tell them I told you-) the biggest complainers in the church are almost always those who contribute the least to the church. ☺ Because giving generously *creates* community.

2. Generosity defeats materialism. The more generous I am with you, the more it defeats materialism in my life. Materialism is the idea that acquiring more and more things is inherently beneficial. (We call it “upward mobility”). The problem is, it messes with our priorities. And just about the time you catch up with the Jones they refinance. Or they file bankruptcy. Either way you never can catch up. It’s like, “Can I get more. I want more. I’ve got to have more. I’ve got to spend more.” It messes with your judgment, and nobody wins. Materialism is built on nothing more than selfishness.

The antidote to materialism, and there’s only one antidote, is generosity. Every time you’re generous, you have a spiritual victory in your heart. Your heart grows. It doesn’t shrink, it grows. Every time you’re generous you break the grip of materialism in your life. And if you’re a parent you need to have your kids watch you giving, because they are targeted by Madison Ave every bit as you are. They *need* to see you being generous, so that they can learn it too. Jesus said it in Matthew 6:24. “*You cannot serve both God and money.*” Notice it doesn’t say you should not. It says you cannot. You can’t have two number ones in your life. One of them has to be number one. You have to *choose* generosity. So anytime you’re generous with other people you’re creating community with them and you’re defeating materialism.

3. Generosity strengthens my faith. The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 9:13 “*Your giving proves the reality of your faith.*” If you are struggling in your faith, or if you’re needing something solid to believe in, begin being generous, and God’s Spirit will kindle in your life. The reason Jesus asks me to be generous is because it’s the exact opposite of my human nature. It is my nature to hoard, stockpile, accumulate, (I like to call it “collecting”) and get it all for myself; and to be fearful and insecure, because how else will I be taken care of myself? But Jesus said, life doesn’t consist in what you collect, it’s what you give.

There are only two kinds of people in life: givers and takers. You’re either a giver in life or you’re a taker. Takers are always the unhappy ones. It’s not by accident the word “miser” and “miserable” come from the same Greek word. When I am miser I will be miserable. The most giving, the most generous people in life are *always* giving their time, giving their energy, giving their resources, and helping other people. They’re the happiest people on the planet. So money actually becomes the acid test of my faith. Am I going to be generous and expect God to keep His promises? A lot of people, even believers, when it comes to money, act like atheists. Like God isn’t there.

What happens when I start becoming a more generous person? The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 9:8 “*God is able to make it up to you by giving you everything you need and... plenty left over to give joyfully to others.*” God says I will make it up to you by giving you everything you need plus I’ll even give you more so you’ll have more to share with other people. God is looking for channels to use. He’s looking for people to say, “God, use me to be a blessing to other people.” And when God finds channel, like a straw, He just starts pouring straight through it. And God’s looking for you and me. God’s desire is to spiritually bless people in this area, and He’s looking for a people who will generously follow Him, whose faith He can strengthen.

4. When I’m generous with other people it’s an investment for eternity. Generosity is an investment. Luke 16:9 “*Use your worldly resources to benefit others...In this way your generosity stores up a reward for you in heaven.*” You’ve heard it said You can’t take it with you. It’s not going to happen. Mortuaries sell burial suits for people who don’t have a suit they want to be buried in. You know what’s unique about a burial suit? It has no pockets! You don’t need them. You can’t take it with you. But you can send it on ahead, by investing in people who are going there. Every time you’re generous with the poor, with a friend, with a neighbor, with anybody, anytime you’re generous with your time, your money, or your effort, God says you’re storing up in the bank in heaven. So how do you store up treasure in heaven like Jesus said to do?

1 Timothy 6 says this “*Tell the rich...*” and by the way, that’s all of you. If you’re an American you’re rich. On globalrichlist.com, you type in your salary and it will tell you what percentage of the world you are in. To

put it in perspective, if you make just \$1,000/year, you're still in the top 44.1%. *"Tell the rich to use their money to do good... giving happily to those in need, always being ready to share with others whatever God has given them. By doing this they will be storing up real treasure for themselves in heaven - the only safe investment for eternity! And they will be living a fruitful Christian life down here as well."* There's no greater investment than the kingdom of God. You make a living by what you get. But you make a life by what you give.

Deuteronomy 15:10 says *"Give generously... and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to."* What is amazing to me how some people trust God for their eternal salvation but don't trust God with their finances. They miss out on the adventure of a lifetime because they can't be generous. They don't have any confidence in God. As a result they themselves miss out on so many blessings. God says I want to bless you in return.

Generosity creates miracles. None of what is going on right now would be happening if it weren't for people being generous, wanting God to bless others. They shared their resources so that we could launch 40 Days of Community, so that people could get connected; so that you could get into a small group and find friends and caring, learning and laughing together. People decided "This is God's. Let's just give it." It's true with the youth building outside too. Have you seen it? It's there because people, some of our people, are being generous with their finances, as well as their time, energy, and talents, and it's creating a miracle that's going to affect unconnected 1000s who will come here and find Jesus Christ. Generosity creates miracles.

Do you see it? Do you see why this feels freaky if you're hearing about this giving thing for the first time? Do you see the deep, underlying reason for generosity? Why life works because of it? Why generosity creates these benefits in your life? Because God himself is generous. God is generous. John 1 says *"We all live off God's generous bounty, gift after gift after gift."* God is a giver. *"God so loved the world that He gave."* You can give without loving but you cannot love without giving. Generosity is the essence of love and it's the essence of fellowship. In Scripture, God talks more about giving and generosity than He does about heaven or hell. The word "believe" is used 272 times in the Bible. God wants you to believe. The word "pray" is used 371 times in the Bible. God wants us to pray. The word "love" is used 714 times in the Bible. God wants you to learn to love. But the word "give" is used 2,162 times, because He wants you to learn to be generous. It is God's most primal nature.

The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 8:9 *"Remember the generosity of Jesus Christ, the Lord of all. He was rich beyond our telling, yet He became poor for your sake so that His poverty might make you rich."* The God of the universe humbled Himself and came to earth in human form – Jesus Christ. And He went through all the trials and tribulations and hassles that we do. But then He allowed Himself to be falsely accused, put on a cross, and crucified. This God who created it all could have come off that cross in a second but didn't. He stayed there to pay for all the sins of the world. The ultimate act of sacrifice and love that altered the universe was an act of generosity. Acts 15:11 says *"... We were saved because Jesus... out of sheer generosity moved to save us..."* The only reason you're going to heaven is because of the generosity of Jesus Christ. If you're seeing this with new eyes, that's God. If you're seeing how it fits with your small group or your life, that's God's Spirit breathing into you, generously inviting you into His kingdom presence. In a moment, we'll be receiving communion. During that time, as a prayer and a witness, I invite you to write down your experience with God: your story. You can hand it to a usher or a pastor.

Would you pray this prayer with me in your heart? Dear God, Forgive me for not realizing this sooner. I know that everything I have is a gift from You. I'd have nothing if You weren't generous. I know that You want me to learn to be like You. Help me to remember that every time I'm generous it creates community and it defeats materialism and it strengthens my faith. Help me to see it as an investment for eternity. Jesus, I know that I'll never be able to repay what You've done for me. But I want to learn to be generous like You. First, I want to give You my life. Then I want to give back to You some of what You've given me. In Your name I pray. Amen.