

SEE GOD AS A GIVER
James 1:17
The Generosity Ladder – Week 1

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Today we're starting a new sermon series about generosity called "The Generosity Ladder."
2. In the first century, the Jerusalem church was struggling because of persecution. So, Paul decided to raise an offering from the different churches that he visited to give to aid the Jerusalem believers. Of all the churches, the churches in the province of Macedonia gave the most. Paul noted several observations about them in his first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 8):
 - i. They themselves were suffering from a severe trial.
 - ii. They were experiencing extreme poverty.
 - iii. Yet they gave not according to their ability, but beyond their ability.
 - iv. They gave freely, not out of compulsion, or begrudgingly. It was their choice.
 - v. In fact, they begged Paul to let them participate. Paul must have tried to talk them out of it.
 - vi. They called the act of generosity a "privilege."
 - vii. Where did this crazy generosity come from?
 - viii. How do we become givers like that? Hang with me, and we'll come back to this story later.

II. THE VISION OF CHURCH ACADIANA

1. The vision of Church Acadiana is to reach the lost, and then equip parents to disciple their kids in the home. Why? Parents are called to do it (Eph 6:4). Parents are better at it.
2. Over the next ten years we dream of 500 people worshiping together on Sundays. Dozens of intergenerational small groups around Acadiana. Hundreds of kids dedicated to memorizing Scripture. Hundreds of men gathering each month to learn how to better lead their homes spiritually.
3. The next step is to build our first building.
 - i. Last year we purchased property, about five acres in Youngsville. By God's grace we were able to pay for it in full.
 - ii. The location is strategic; the area is booming, with many new neighborhoods under construction as we speak. And there are no churches anywhere nearby.
 - iii. The building will be a little under 7,000 square feet. It will seat close to three hundred. It will be a multipurpose facility that can be used as a fellowship hall and a worship auditorium. It's really a phase 1 building. When we outgrow it, we will build our larger worship auditorium, and this one will be the fellowship hall.

4. Why Now? If we would have done this two or three years ago, it would have fallen in the middle COVID, and that would've spoiled our plans. If we wait for several years, we don't know if the movie theater will continue to be available for us. We believe that there are many people who would be willing to come to Church Acadiana if we had our own building.
5. Cost: \$1,050,000
 - i. Loan: \$400,000
 - ii. Mission Builders: \$300,000
 - iii. Our goal: \$350,000
6. As a church we are going to embark on a capital campaign called Build to Equip. It's called Build to Equip because our goal is to build an equipping center to help us further our vision of equipping parents to reach the next generation. We are going to focus the next two years on raising money.
7. This is going to take more than just your regular tithes and offerings.
 - i. Those of you who aren't giving, we're going to need you to get in the game.
 - ii. Those of you are giving less than a tithe, we're going to need you to start tithing.
 - iii. Those of you are tithing, we're going to need you give over and above.
8. What kind of giving will this take? Big giving. It's going to take some big gifts. The biggest giving you've probably ever giving to a church or non-profit. We're going to need some of you to give \$10,000, \$20,000, \$30,000 gifts.
9. What are Lydia and I doing?
 - i. \$25,000 from our housing fund on October 16 – Commitment Day.
 - ii. Double our tithe starting in November.
 - iii. Total of about \$40,000.
 - iv. Take what we normally tithe in a year, multiply it by more than 5, and we're giving that to the building campaign, plus we're going to continue tithing.
10. We're not going to ask you to make a pledge until October 16. That's Commitment Day, when you want to you turn in a Commitment Card. We'd like you to give 10-20% of your total pledge on that day. Then your recurring donations to Build to Equip will begin the first Sunday in November.
11. Until then, we need you to
 - i. Pray. Pray about what to give.
 - ii. Prepare. Make a decision, and get ready for October 16.
 - iii. Participate. All in. You might say, "I'm tapped out." Can you give \$1 extra? Can you make a lifestyle adjustment, and dedicate the difference? Cancel cable. Eat out less. Cancel a vacation.

III. THE GENEROSITY LADDER

1. To help us get ready, I'm going to preach a sermon series on generosity called the Generosity Ladder. A ladder is a tool to help you reach higher; to help you get to a

higher level. This sermon series is designed to be a ladder to help you reach higher in generosity. I want to take you from a place of stinginess, to generosity.

2. Take a look at this picture.
 - i. At the bottom is STINGINESS. The stingy person is not generous. They live in a place of financial stress and curse.
 - ii. At the top is GENOROSITY. The generous person lives in a place of financial peace and blessing.
 - iii. In the middle are six steps.
 - iv. Over the next six weeks I want to help you move from a place of stinginess to generosity.
3. Today we're going to talk about the first step: SEE GOD AS A GIVER.

IV. TEXT

1. **James 1:17** "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, who does not change like shifting shadows."
2. Meaning: Every good thing in your life is a gift from God.

V. WHAT HAS GOD GIVEN US?

1. Every material blessing.

- i. **1 Timothy 6:17** "Instruct those who are rich in the present age not to be arrogant or to set their hope on the uncertainty of wealth, but on God, who richly provides us with all things to enjoy."
- ii. Every good thing in your life comes from God. Food; shelter; clothing; job; spouse; children; friends; education; medical care; health. Your very life is a gift from God. He created you. He sustains you. Every breath, every heartbeat is a gift from God.
- iii. **Acts 17:28** "For in him we live and move and have our being"
- iv. **Colossians 1:17** "He is before all things, and by him all things hold together."
- v. Some people might argue and say that the good things in their life are the result of their hard work and talent and intelligence. But it was God who gave you the energy to work hard; it is God who gave you your brain, and your talents.
- vi. **Deuteronomy 8:17-18** "17 You may say to yourself, 'My power and my own ability have gained this wealth for me,' 18 but remember that the Lord your God gives you the power to gain wealth, in order to confirm his covenant he swore to your fathers, as it is today."
- vii. **John 3:27** "No one can receive anything unless it has been given to him from heaven."
- viii. Everything good in your life is a gift from God to you.
- ix. Human beings tend to forget two important truths: First, we are blessed. Second, all of our blessings are a gift from God.
- x. One time I went to Walmart by myself to run some errands, and I was feeling low. I was feeling sorry for myself. I was throwing a pity-party for myself.

“Woe is me. I have it so bad. I have it so hard. Nothing is going right.”
When I walked out of the store I noticed one of the cart-pushers, and young man who was physically handicapped. It walked funny, and he moved his arms funny; he didn’t have full control or full mobility; I’m not sure what his particular handicap is called. But he was full of joy. He was working diligently, smiling, and telling everyone, “God bless you!” This was a young man who didn’t was physically disabled, working a non-glamorous job out in the elements, but he was joyful. I was immediately convicted. I had not right to be depressed; to feel sorry for myself. I remembered then two realities: I am blessed, and my blessings come from God.

- xi. You may have some problems. Everything in your life might not be going the way you want. You may not have everything you want. But you are blessed. You have many good things going for you. And all those blessings, they come from God. God is generous.
- xii. What else has God given us?

2. Every spiritual blessing.

- i. **Ephesians 1:3** “Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavens in Christ.”
- ii. What is a blessing? It is God’s favor poured out. Spiritual blessings are God’s intangible favor poured out on us.
- iii. Consider some of the many spiritual blessings God has given us: He adopted us into His family; He forgave our sins; He promises us eternal life; He has given us the indwelling Holy Spirit; He has called us to serve as His ambassadors, telling people about Jesus. He has surrounded us with a loving church family. He has given us the Bible, revealing all of God’s will and plan for us. He has given us a brand new heart with the desire and power to please Him. He has given us the gift of prayer – constant and immediate access to His presence and His unlimited resources.
- iv. Some Christians are rich and some poor. Some are healthy and some not healthy. Some have marriage and family and some are single. We have different material blessings. But we have equal spiritual blessings. We have all been blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ. And spiritual blessings are much better than material blessings, because nothing can take them away from us. You can lose your health, your finances, your friends, your job, your freedom, but you can never lose the spiritual blessings that we have in Christ Jesus.
- v. I’m reminded of the time when Paul and Silas were put in jail in Philip for preaching about Jesus (Acts 16). They had lost their freedom. They had lost their health and physical comfort – they were stripped naked, beaten with rods, and severely flogged, and their feet were secured in the stocks. They had lost their reputation, as they were deemed enemies of the state. They

were facing the very real possibility of execution. They had no idea when they would be released. And yet in jail, at midnight, they were singing and praising the Lord. What were they so happy about? Even though they had lost material blessings, they still had every spiritual blessing in Christ.

- vi. And all of these spiritual blessings are a gift from God.
- vii. But that's not all that God has given us.

3. His Only Son.

- i. **John 3:16** "For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."
- ii. The best example of God's generosity is not that merely that He gave us the gifts of forgiveness and eternal life, but how He did it. In order to save us, God gave His only Son to die in our place for our sins. Jesus willingly submitted to crucifixion – the worst form of capital punishment known to mankind – in order to rescue us from sin, Satan, and hell.
- iii. And what makes this even more amazing is that God sent His Son to die for us even though we were undeserving.
- iv. **Romans 5:6-8** "6 For while we were still helpless, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For rarely will someone die for a just person—though for a good person perhaps someone might even dare to die. 8 But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."
- v. In fact, all of God's blessings, all of His gifts are undeserving. What do we deserve for our sins? Eternal punishment. Yet God in His extravagant generosity has blessed us with every material blessing, every spiritual blessing, and even the sacrifice of His own Son.
- vi. Our God is a generous God. He is a giver.
- vii. Why does it matter that God is generous? Two Reasons.
 - 1. Generous people recognize that they are recipients of God's generosity. We give because He first gave.
 - a. **Anonymous** "A generous man forgets what he gives and remembers what he receives."
 - 2. Because we are called to be imitators of God.
 - a. **Ephesians 5:1** "Therefore, be imitators of God, as dearly loved children"
 - b. God is generous, and He wants us to be like Him – generous. He wants us to share our resources with those in need; He wants us to use our resources to build His kingdom and accomplish His purposes.

VI. YOUR FIRST STEP

1. The foundation for generosity is to see that God is a giver, and that you are called to imitate Him.
2. The problem is that if you haven't given your heart to God, then that doesn't matter. If you haven't given your heart to God, then you don't care that God is a giver; and you don't care what God wants you to be. So, before you can start to climb the generosity ladder, you have to give your heart to God.
3. Do you remember I started the sermon with the story of Paul raising a special offering to help the Jerusalem believers, and the Macedonian churches were the most generous? Even though they were in a severe trial, were in extreme poverty, they begged Paul to give them the privilege of giving. And they gave more than they could afford. They gave sacrificially. Where does that kind of generosity come from? Paul explains.
4. **1 Corinthians 8:5** "Instead, they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us by God's will." Their crazy generosity flowed from their devotion to Christ. "They gave themselves first to the Lord." Once you give yourself to God, and all that you have, then generosity is natural. Today I want to challenge you to give your heart to God.
5. What does that mean? I want to address two different groups.
 - i. The unsaved.
 1. Some of you have never made the decision to repent of your sins and ask Jesus Christ to come into your life to be your Lord and Savior. Jesus died to save you, and He rose again. But to get saved, you have to do three things – ABC:
 2. Admit you are a sinner in need of a Savior.
 3. Believe that Jesus Christ died and rose again, and that He deserves your highest allegiance.
 4. Call on Jesus to save you. Are you sure that you've made this decision? Are you sure that you are saved? Are you sure that you are going to heaven? Are you sure that Jesus lives in you? If you are 99% sure, then you are 100% lost. Today, your first step on the generosity ladder is to get saved. I encourage you to do that today.
 - ii. The uncommitted.
 1. Some of you are saved, but you have not fully surrendered your life to Jesus Christ. You still haven't fully released control of every arena of your life to Jesus. You are holding on to some things – your time, your sexuality, your finances.
 2. Your first step on the generosity ladder is to surrender your life to Jesus Christ. You need to say, "Jesus, I don't even know what this means, but I surrender all to you today. My finances, my sexuality, my time, my physical health, my relationships, my career – everything. I hand it over to you to be in control.

6. We're going to be talking about generosity for the next few weeks, but God doesn't want your money, He wants your heart. Our church doesn't want your money, we want you to give your heart to God.
7. Because you can give all your money to the church and still go to hell. You can give all your money to the church and still not be generous. Generosity starts not with sharing your resources with the needy, but with giving your heart to God.
8. Today our church is embarking on a very challenging journey. We have to do the impossible – raise money that we don't have. We have to come up with \$350,000. It's going to take sacrifice. It's going to take faith. But most importantly, it's going to take a group of people who are fully devoted to God.
9. God is generous and calls you to imitate Him, but none of that matters to you if you haven't given your heart to God.
10. Would you do that today?

VII. CONCLUSION

1. When I was a child my parents raised me in church. And I always believed in Jesus. I was baptized at age of seven. I went to church every Sunday. But while I believed in Jesus, I hadn't given my heart to God. And as I grew older it started to show. Misbehaving at school, bad grades, potty mouth, disobeying my parents, smoking, dating non-Christian girls. But one day at church God pulled on my heart. He made it clear that I was not a real Christian. I had not given Him my heart. I believed, but I was still in control. At the end of the service, there was music playing, and the preacher said, "If you want to give your life to Christ, walk to the front and let me pray with you." I'm going to ask you to do the same thing this morning. As we stand and sing this last song, if you want to give your life to Christ, whether to be saved or to fully surrender, then come forward and pray with me.