



LEADER GUIDE

# 30 Days of Generosity

A Stewardship Resource



**Everence®**

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## **Acknowledgments and permissions**

All Scripture quotations are from the New International Version unless otherwise stated.

Updated by Everence in 2025. Adapted from original material developed by the Brethren in Christ Church, Atlantic Conference.



# Introduction

Jesus had much to say about our financial decisions – largely because he knew they were actually spiritual decisions. Yet in many congregational settings, teaching about giving is limited to one special Sunday each year or reserved for times of urgent need. What would happen in your church if the entire congregation spent one month learning about and living out biblical generosity?

30 Days of Generosity is more than a concentrated curriculum to help your congregation increase ministry funding. The primary goal of this resource is to transform the hearts of your congregation. To encourage each one to see that every financial decision is a spiritual decision – an act of worship in response to God’s goodness. 30 Days of Generosity helps people consider what is important to them, how they currently live, and how they invest their time, money, and gifts. A healthier financial ledger is likely after completing 30 Days of Generosity, but a changed congregation will be the first fruits of your commitment.

30 Days of Generosity provides your church with the tools necessary to teach life-changing stewardship principles over a concentrated period. Many pastors see the grip poor financial stewardship has on members of their congregations, but they struggle with how to best resolve the issues. 30 Days of Generosity helps leaders overcome these common challenges:

- How to teach about money without causing offense.
- How to encourage generous givers.
- How to sustain a focus on stewardship beyond one Sunday.
- How to model a stewardship lifestyle.
- How to call people to a deeper commitment to Christ and stewarding God’s resources.



## Basic truths

30 Days of Generosity is based on the following three foundational truths:

1. True stewardship is about more than money.
2. Our perspective on money needs to come from Scripture, centered on God being the creator and giver of everything.
3. How we manage God's resources speaks volumes about our trust in God.

When applied, these three truths will help churches:

- Better manage God's resources.
- Express their faith in all areas of life.
- Give to the full work of the church.

## Core principles

30 Days of Generosity makes use of five core stewardship principles throughout the month-long study:

1. **Generosity is Christ centered.** As followers of Jesus, we are accountable for how we handle what has been entrusted to us. Ultimately, everything we see, touch, and manage is God's.
2. **Generosity is trust oriented.** God immediately demonstrated his trust in people by giving them tasks to do and asking them to manage what he created. As God's managers, we must decide in whom and in what we trust. Do we trust God for our future provisions, or do we hoard and control things we don't even own?
3. **Generosity is being thankful in spirit.** It is not how much we have, but what we do with it and in what spirit. Realizing God is the source of all things increases our gratitude for what God has provided and done on our behalf.
4. **Generosity is driven by love.** Jesus taught that the entire law of God is summarized in love for him and others. We manage God's resources from a desire to love God and other people.
5. **Generosity is an act of obedience.** There is an expectation that each follower of Christ will be faithful to honor God with the management of their God-given resources. The goal is to hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Everyone is a steward. The question is: What kind?

## The components

30 Days of Generosity is an integrated teaching tool designed to engage different parts of congregational life by teaching a consistent weekly message. Each part of the curriculum is interconnected so that sermons, worship services, devotionals, memory verses, and group studies work together to study the same truths. This combined effort increases the ability of the curriculum to transform hearts. The different components included are:

### Sermons

The central teaching emphasis occurs in the weekly sermon. The four sermons provided include a foundational text, insights, applications, and illustrations. As a leader, you have the flexibility to use the sermons as written, or to apply further study to the texts and ideas so the sermons become your own and better connect with your congregation. Each Sunday morning is a chance to cast the vision for people to trust God with all he has provided.

### Worship services

The sermons are supported each week by the worship service in which they are delivered. Included are ideas and outlines for four distinct services built around each week's main emphasis, including models that are more traditional and more contemporary based on your congregation's preference.

### Prayer

Your congregation should consider a prayer strategy for the month-long commitment. The curriculum is only a tool in God's hands. God is the one who changes hearts and lives. A prayer strategy before, during, and after the program will help turn 30 Days of Generosity from a stewardship tool into a transformational event in your church's life. Prayer ideas for bulletin inserts or a one-hour prayer vigil are included at the end of this guide.

### Small group materials

Each adult in your congregation will receive a participant's guide. This guide is divided into weekly sections, including a weekly small group participant's study. Each small group study is self-guided and incorporates time for:

- Coming together (getting to know one another better)
- Learning together (exploring what God's word says)
- Sharing together (applying what is learned)
- Praying together (praying for and ministering to one another)

Each small group study tracks with the weekly emphasis and can be used for a Sunday school setting or mid-week small group.

## Daily devotions

Each participant's guide includes a daily devotional for each day of the month. Each day, members of your congregation will read the same devotional, which includes a Scripture verse, reflection and application sections, a to-do idea, and prayer.

Daily devotionals are a critical component of the overall curriculum since they allow the person to focus on what God is saying to them. Pastors are encouraged to exhort their congregations to commit to the daily devotions. Testimonies about what God is saying in individual lives should be shared to further inspire commitment to the daily readings.

## Scripture memory verses

Each week there is a Scripture verse for the entire congregation to memorize. Listed in the back of the participant's guide, the memory verse is a great way to inscribe God's truth on people's hearts. Consider printing the verses on small cards and hand them out each week.

## Celebration Sunday

Plan to have a "Celebration Sunday" following the completion of the program. Coming together over a shared meal and asking for personal testimonies of how lives have been touched can create new energy for future generosity. 30 Days of Generosity is just the beginning! Commitment to being a good steward of God's gifts never ends.

# Promoting the curriculum

Effectively promoting 30 Days of Generosity to your congregation is important. Seek out people in your church with organizational and communication gifts who can help get the word out about this exciting new congregational focus. You will want to communicate the following:

- What your goals are for the program.
- What the components of the program are.
- How members of the congregation will participate.
- Where and when members will get their participant guides.
- How these guides will be incorporated into small groups/Sunday school.
- The importance of prayer for and during the campaign and in their own lives.

## Pre-campaign

At least six to eight weeks in advance, begin informing the congregation of the start date for 30 Days of Generosity. Use personal letters, emails, social media posts, church newsletters, Sunday morning announcements, and bulletin inserts. Regular, frequent communication in advance will build anticipation.

## During the campaign

Consider a minimum of one weekly communication to the entire church via email, social media, or newsletter with updates and further encouragement. Take the opportunity to reinforce the weekly theme.

## A special note to pastors

Pastoral leadership and excitement are critical for the success of 30 Days of Generosity in your church. Your energy, focus and dedication to the program will greatly influence your overall outcome. From experience, here is where pastors can make the biggest impact:

### **Communicate the vision**

Share what you hope to see happen in individual lives as well as in the church as a whole. Cast a wide net over the opportunities that will present themselves if the hearts of your members start to change in regard to spiritual decisions about resources. Communicate the vision often and passionately.

### **Surround yourself with a great team**

Don't try to do this on your own and in your own strength. First, seek God's guidance and affirmation and then consider people in your congregation who could lead each of the component areas. Search for people who share a passion for generosity. Tap the shoulders of those who communicate well and are known team builders. Assemble a team that can help give legs to the program.

### **Communicate regularly**

Repetition of the vision and goals is necessary for the congregation to buy into it. You cannot over-communicate a new idea early on, so don't hesitate to keep 30 Days of Generosity in front of people.

### **Raise the bar**

People will commit to something they deem valuable and worthwhile. There is a cost associated with anything life-changing, just as there is a cost associated with maintaining the status quo. Challenge your people to a higher standard, a reflection of the New Testament Church, and a lifestyle that makes a difference for the Kingdom of God. Be in prayer that all who hear your challenge will take a step of faith.

## Further support

Along the way, you may have questions or simply want to talk with someone about new ideas you'd like to try within the 30-day period. Feel free to contact your stewardship consultant. We will be glad to assist you in any way we can.



# Sermons

**Week one:** It's about God

**Week two:** It's about purpose

**Week three:** It's about provision

**Week four:** It's about me!



## Week one: It's about God

### Sermon outline

1. Introduction
2. Foundational truths about God's stuff
  - a. God owns it all. (Job 41:11; Deuteronomy 8:18)
  - b. What I think about and how I handle God's stuff is central to my spiritual life and joy. (Luke 3:7)
  - c. God wants me to give it away. (Luke 12:13-21)
3. Principles of giving
  - a. God owns everything and I am his manager.
  - b. My heart will always follow God's money. (Matthew 6:21)
4. Conclusion

### Sermon text

The streets of Cairo, Egypt, were hot and dusty. Pat and Rakel Thurman took us down an alley. We drove past Arabic signs to a gate that opened to a plot of overgrown grass. It was a graveyard for American missionaries.

As my family and I followed, Pat pointed to a sun-scorched tombstone that read: "William Borden, 1887-1913." Borden, a Yale graduate and heir to great wealth, rejected a life of ease in order to bring the gospel to Muslims. Refusing even to buy himself a car, Borden gave away hundreds of thousands of dollars to missions. After only four months of zealous ministry in Egypt, he contracted spinal meningitis and died at the age of 25.

I dusted off the epitaph on Borden's grave. After describing his love and sacrifices for the Kingdom of God and for the Muslim people, the inscription ended with a phrase I've never forgotten: "Apart from faith in Christ, there is no explanation for such a life."

The Thurmans took us straight from Borden's grave to the Museum of Egyptian Antiquities. The King Tut exhibit was mind-boggling. Tutankhamun, the boy king, was only about 18 when he died. He was buried with solid gold chariots and thousands of golden artifacts. His gold coffin was found within gold tombs within gold tombs within gold tombs. The burial site was filled with tons of gold.

The Egyptians believed in an afterlife – one where they could take earthly treasures. But all the treasures intended for King Tut's eternal enjoyment stayed right where they were until Howard Carter discovered the burial chamber in 1922. They hadn't been touched for more than 3,000 years.

I was struck by the contrast between these two graves. Borden's was obscure, dusty, and hidden off the back alley of a street littered with garbage. Tutankhamen's tomb glittered with unimaginable wealth. Yet where are these two young men now? One, who lived in opulence and called himself king, is in the misery of a Christ-less eternity. The other, who lived a modest life on earth in service of the one true King, is enjoying his everlasting reward in the presence of his Lord.

Tut's life was tragic because of an awful truth discovered too late – he couldn't take his trea-

asures with him. William Borden's life was triumphant. Why? Because instead of leaving behind his treasures, he sent them on ahead. (The Treasure Principle, Randy Alcorn, pages 34-36.)

### ***1. Foundational truth about God's stuff***

What about you? Are you living a life of triumph or tragedy? A lot of it depends on your understanding and your practice of what you do with all the stuff you have at your disposal. I want to begin this morning by sharing with you some foundational truth about "his stuff." Often in services, reference is made during the offering about giving God his tithes and our offerings. In some ways that's incorrect because the very first foundational truth I want you to catch is that God owns it all. It's all about God. He created, he sustains, and he owns it all!

There are several Scriptures that clearly make this claim. From Job 41:11, there's a discussion between Job and the Lord, and the Lord is making his case before Job who is complaining about all that has happened to him. Remember, this is taking place at the end of the story and the Lord says to Job in verse 11, "Who has a claim against me that I must pay? Everything under Heaven belongs to me." God owns it all.

Psalms 24:1, "The Earth is the Lord's and everything in it. The world and all who live in it."

Haggai 2:8, "'The silver is mine and the gold is mine,' declares the Lord Almighty."

Deuteronomy 8:18, "Remember the Lord your God, for it is he that gives you the ability to produce wealth."

And 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, "You are not your own, you've been bought for a price."

Genesis 1:1, "In the Beginning, God..." is supported throughout Scripture. God creates! He sustains!

God owns all of it. It's all his. The air you breathe, the pavement you walk on, the house you live in, the food that restores your body, and the clothing on your back, God owns it all. It's all about him! The sooner we recognize that truth the better off we'll be.

Now, there is a second foundational truth I want you to see as well. What we think about and how we handle all that is his is central to our spiritual lives and our spiritual joy. In essence, what I'm saying is that faith and finances are inseparably linked. I don't know about you, but I find it very interesting that Jesus talks more about the topic of money than he talks about the teachings of heaven and hell combined. More than 15% of everything that Jesus teaches about in Scriptures relates to possessions and money. Why such an emphasis? Because of this foundational truth – God owns it all.

There is a basic connection between our spiritual life and how we think and handle money and possessions and things. We may try to separate our faith from our finances, but God sees them as inseparable.

Let me share with you a prime example. In Luke 3, John the Baptist is preaching to the crowds. They've gathered to hear him and to be baptized by him. There are three different groups that ask him what they need to do in order to bear the fruit of repentance. Look at Luke 3. Beginning in verse 7, "John says to the crowds coming out to be baptized, 'You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?'" Not quite the way to win friends and influence people by addressing them in that manner. Nonetheless, this is John the Baptist. In verse 8 he says, "Produce fruit in keeping with repentance." And then the groups that heard that word ask him first, "What should we do then?" In other words, to produce fruit in keeping with repentance, what should we do? John's answer in verse 11 is that essentially everyone should share their clothes and their food with the poor. Then in verse

12 the tax collectors ask the same, "What should we do?" In verse 13, he essentially says, "You tax collectors shouldn't pocket extra money." And then soldiers ask, "What should we do to produce this fruit in keeping with repentance?" And John says, "Be content with your wages and don't extort money."

Each time it would appear that these groups are asking a very spiritual question: "How do we show that we have a repentant heart, spirit, and attitude?" What would you say if people asked you that? I think I would have a tendency to say, "Worship God with all your heart, have a passion for Christ, and let the peace of Christ rule in your heart." Do you see what John says? Each answer that he gives relates to money and possessions. Nobody asked him about that. They asked him what they should do to demonstrate the fruit of the spiritual transformation they'd experienced.

The same thing happened in Luke 19. Zacchaeus says to Jesus, "Look Lord! Here and now I give half my possessions to the poor and if I have cheated anybody out of anything I will pay back four times the amount." Jesus' response gives a spiritual answer to this comment about giving. "Today salvation has come to this house." Zacchaeus' new approach to how he was going to use his money showed his transformed heart. This is what Jesus says.

In Acts 2 and 4, you see the connection again. There were Jewish converts who eagerly sold their possessions and gave them to the needy because of their transformed lives in coming to Christ. Their habits with their pocketbooks changed. They recognized that God owned it all. How they handled all that was directly related to their spiritual life. In Acts 19, there were some Ephesian occultists who showed they were truly converted when they burned their magic books that were worth what would have been millions of dollars today.

The truth is, how you think about it and how you handle all that is his, all that he's allowed you to have, is directly related to your spiritual life, your spiritual development, and your spiritual joy.

It's about God! So, what's the truth about what God wants you to do with all that is his?

The truth is he wants you to give it away! [Read Luke 12:13-21]

We have here a story of the rich man who spent all his wealth on himself. He planned to tear down his barns and build larger ones and store up more for himself so he could retire early and take life easy. The Lord calls him a fool and said that very night his life would be demanded of him. You will get what you prepared for yourself. The greatest indictment against him, the proof of his spiritual condition, is that he was rich toward himself and not rich toward God. It's about God and what is created, sustained, and owned by him. It's not about us and what we refer to as ours.

When another rich young man (Luke 18:18-29) pressed Jesus about what he needed to do to gain eternal life, Jesus told him to "Sell your possessions and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me." The man was obsessed with earthly treasures. Jesus called him to do something higher and that was to give them away. Jesus knew money and possessions were the man's god. He realized the man wouldn't serve God unless he took those possessions off the throne of his life and put God there.

Please understand that when I tell you this truth – that God wants you to give his stuff away – I'm not saying God doesn't believe you should have treasures, things, possessions, or money. I'm not tearing down the wealthy for the sake of the poor. All I'm saying is that the word from the Lord is we are to store up for ourselves treasures in heaven and not on earth (Matthew 6:19-20). The way you do that is by giving away what he's given to you for the sake of the kingdom. Instead of storing up treasures for yourself, hoarding, keeping, stockpiling and amassing wealth and things – all that is God's – he wants you to take what is his and store it up in heaven. It's about him, not you and yours!

What Jesus is talking about in the Matthew 6 passage is deferred gratification. You see, the man who finds the treasure pays a high price now by giving up all that he has, but soon he'll gain a fabulous treasure. If you keep your eyes on the treasures of heaven, the short-term sacrifice you make now will be with joy. You see, present joy comes as you anticipate future joy. What's this treasure in heaven? Well, it includes power, which we read about in Luke 19:15-19. It includes possessions, which we read about in Matthew 19:21. It includes pleasures that we read about in Psalms 16:11, and Jesus promises that those who sacrifice will receive a hundred times as much in heaven, Matthew 19:21. Now, that is 10,000% – quite a return on your investment!

Indeed, Jesus is our ultimate treasure. Everything else pales in comparison to him and the joy of knowing him. A person, Jesus, is our first treasure. A place, heaven, is our second treasure. Possessions and eternal rewards are our third treasure. [Delete if principles of giving segment (below) is not used]. So, as we look at some principles of giving that flow from these two foundational truths, keep in the back of your mind these questions: What person are you living for? What place are you living for? What possessions are you living for?

Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven. He wants you to give away all that is his.

Store up those treasures in heaven, why? Because it's right? Yes, but not just that... because it's smart? Yes, but also because such treasures will last! You see, Jesus' appeal isn't just an emotional one. It's very logical. Invest in what has lasting value.

Folks, you will never see a hearse pulling a U-Haul. You can't take it with you. Remember it's all about God. He creates, sustains, and owns it all. He wants your spiritual life and joy to be enhanced by giving it away! [Message could end here or move on to two principles.]

## ***II. Principles of giving***

Therefore, let me give you a couple of principles about giving away all that is his.

The first principle is like that first foundational truth, God owns everything and you – and I – are his managers. God has entrusted us to care for what is his. He's not giving it to us. He's entrusted it to our care. He has made us stewards. As stewards we have no sense of entitlement to the master's stuff. We simply manage it.

Once you realize all you have is his, it's easy to give away God's stuff to do God's work. When you do, you discover a peace and a joy you never had when you thought it was yours.

A man rode up to John Wesley, a theologian from the 18th century, and told him something terrible had happened: "Your house burned to the ground." Wesley's response was, "No, the Lord's house burned to the ground, that's one less responsibility for me." His response wasn't an attitude of denial, but it was a bold affirmation of truth: God is the owner of everything and I'm simply a manager.

We get into trouble when we start thinking we're the owners... my stuff, my field, my house, my car. We need to be thinking like stewards and investment managers. We need to always be looking for the best place to invest the owner's money. It's about him and all that's his!

The second principle is: My heart will follow God's money. Jesus said in Matthew 6:21, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Jesus was saying that our hearts will follow his money. Show me your checkbook, your credit card statements, and your receipts and I can tell you where your heart is.

Now, just suppose you're giving money to people who are going on a mission trip or suppose you're



planning to support a family that is looking to minister to those in a developing nation. Then when you see an article on that country or this family, you get hooked. If you're sending money to plant churches here in North America or other parts of the world and you find there is a crisis, maybe it's a natural disaster in part of the world that you're supporting; you take interest, watch the news, and fervently pray. Just like the compass needle that points north, your heart will follow your treasure.

Where your money is, there your heart will also be.

I've heard people say, and I'm sure you have too, "I want to have a heart for missions, for the persecuted church, or for youth, children, or worship." Jesus tells us exactly how to get it. Put his money in it and your heart will follow. Now, sure you can throw money at something and pretend, but I'm talking about sacrificial giving for which your heart must follow. Do you care about eternal things, lost souls, helping the poor, and touching the needy? Look for ways to give what is God's, his possessions and his money, to that need and that hurt and that kingdom-building adventure, opposed to just getting more for yourself. God wants your heart. He isn't just looking for donors in his kingdom, those who stand outside and just give money as an act of philanthropy or grace. He's looking for disciples who are so immersed in a cause that they give to it. He wants people so filled with a vision of eternity that they dream of investing money, time, and prayers where they will matter most.

Giving isn't the only thing we can do with God's money. We need to feed and clothe and house and transport our families, true, but when the basics are taken care of why shouldn't the rest go towards treasures in heaven? Think about it this way: If you are laying up treasures here on earth, and that could include acquiring a real nice house with a lot of stuff in it, a nifty car or two – or three – a nice bank account, and a great retirement plan, if that's what you're spending your life on, then every day you live you are moving away from your treasure. Death means loss because you can't take it with you.

However, if you're laying up treasures in heaven, looking for every way you possibly can give every day of your life, then you're moving closer toward your treasures in heaven. For you, death is gain. One road leads to despair and another to rejoicing.

Which road are you on? Is your life one of triumph or tragedy?

Truly, when you realize and live out the truth that your stewardship is all about God, then you will know the triumph he desires for you! Amen.

## Week two: It's about purpose

### Sermon outline

1. Introduction
2. Question No. 1: Have you ever dreamed about something for a long time and then paid the cost to make the dream a reality, only to experience disappointment when the dream was met?
  - a. Matthew 6:19-21
  - b. 1 Corinthians 9:24-27
  - c. Some people understood the teaching of Christ. Others did not.
    - iv. Zaccheus got it.
    - v. The rich young ruler didn't get it.
3. Question No. 2: When you think about it, what is your treasure?
  - a. Stewardship is about chasing the things God chases. Investing our lives in God's purposes.
4. Question No. 3: What changes would have to be made in your life for you to live like the Kingdom of God mattered above all else?
5. Conclusion

### Sermon text

It's been said that life is a series of dreams – some realized, some forgotten, and some misplaced.

Ever had a dream? Something you wanted more than a passing whim or desire, a dream, a desire for something that drives you, motivates you, pushes you to sacrifice and give of your energies to accomplish?

Most of us have dreams. Desires we would give our heart and soul to accomplish. For some of us the dreams are financial:

- A certain level of savings.
- A certain kind of house.
- A certain car.
- A certain kind of investment.

For some, the dreams are stuff... we just like our toys:

- A boat.
- A vehicle.
- A special appliance.
- A tool.

For others the dreams that keep us awake at night are things we'd like to do:

- Lying on a beach.
- Rafting a river.
- Skydiving out of a plane.
- Backpacking through Europe.

Dreams are good. In fact, it is dreams that give life meaning and excitement. It is dreams that motivate us to go after the best life has to offer.

We live in a world that is designed to foster dreams. Commercials sell us on the latest gadget

or experience or product that will take us one step closer to the good life. Hollywood tells us what we need and want. Magazines shout from the rack what it is we need in our lives and how to live our lives better... more peaceful, richer, fuller, happier, and less busy.

And the truth is, when I think of all that is out there to have, experience, attain and love, the side of me that loves this world begins to dream of what life might be like if I had everything my heart desired. It happens all the time. The desire in me wells up an imagination of life as it could be – no, should be – for me.

Question: Have you ever had that experience of dreaming of something for a long time, paid the costs to make the dream a reality, and then experienced disappointment when the dream was met?

There is another side to me, though. It's the Jesus side. The part of me that loves Christ usually kicks in somewhere and settles for a degree of sadness, for experience has taught me all the things I pursue and make a priority will at some point disappoint me. Often chasing after something is more fun than attaining it. Life has taught me just what Jesus taught, the things I treasure (apart from God) can never bring lasting satisfaction. The dreams often end up in a big pile of useless things and experiences, simply piled up on top of everyone else's.

Jesus said it like this...

"Don't store up treasures on earth! Moths and rust can destroy them, and thieves can break in and steal them. Instead, store up your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy them, and thieves cannot break in and steal them. Your heart will always be where your treasure is." (Matthew 6:19-21)

Jesus doesn't cut any slack when talking about the desires of our hearts. Jesus was very clear about what the desires of our hearts, what the dreams of our life should be focused on. When Christ closed his eyes and dreamt, he dreamt of a kingdom that was different from anything our world had known or expected. He dreamt of a kingdom that wasn't set up on power, or money, or happiness. He dreamt of a kingdom that would change the world forever. He talked of a kingdom filled with treasures in heaven. And this is the kingdom he talked about, prayed about, and called people to live out.

In 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, Paul says...

"You know that many runners enter a race, and only one of them wins the prize. So run to win! Athletes work hard to win a crown that cannot last, but we do it for a crown that will last forever. I don't run without a goal. And I don't box by beating my fists in the air. I keep my body under control and make it my slave, so I won't lose out after telling the good news to others."

God recognizes that life is a race. That many things are competing for our affection and to be the object of our desire. And Christ invites us to run the race. To set our focus and our desires on a kingdom, on treasures, on dreams that will not fade in value, will not disappoint, will not reduce our human experience to one more experience after another. Jesus said, "Don't store up treasures on earth! Moth and rust destroy them and thieves break in and steal them." Paul said, "Athletes work hard to win a crown that cannot last forever, but we run the race for a crown that will last forever."

If my desire is to be a follower of Christ, the prime object of my dreams and hopes and desires, my treasure or my crown, must be different than that of my neighbor. God calls us to a higher purpose.

God invites us to a higher calling. And he has been about the business of calling people to something more throughout all of human history.

- Abraham
- David
- Prophets
- Peter
- Paul

God's concern isn't comfort or happiness. God's concern isn't about new experiences. God's concern isn't for stunning success. God's concern is about a world made different. A world that is changed. A world where sin has lost its power and influence. A world that is freed from the bondage of money. A world that is free from dreams that never deliver the promised fun and the promised hope.

That's where stewardship comes in. Jesus invites us to pursue a different kingdom.

A kingdom where the treasure is in some future world. He invites us to run a race, and the crown is eternal. Not temporal. He invites us to abandon the control our own hopes and dreams have on our lives and to live lives by a different agenda. But you and I have a choice. We must decide what's most important. We must decide what in our life is worth chasing. We must decide what treasure we pursue. We must decide what crown we beat our bodies to win. And that is what stewardship is about. For Jesus, stewardship isn't about raising money or managing what we have. It is about something bigger. For Jesus, stewardship is all about choosing what we chase in life. It's an issue of purpose.

Like so much of what Jesus spent his time talking about, some got it and some didn't.

### ***Zacchaeus***

We don't really know what it was that compelled Zacchaeus's interest in Jesus. We don't know why the crooked tax collector would care what an itinerant preacher from Galilee would say. But something about Jesus' life stirred interest in Zacchaeus. And after a lifetime of cheating, bullying and stealing from people... after a lifetime of simply pursuing his own kingdom, Zacchaeus switched agendas. In Luke 19:8, we read...

Zacchaeus made this massive transition from kingdom of this world, from the pursuit of what mattered to him, to the pursuit of the kingdom. He took his worldly resources and invested them in people. And that transaction totally changed his life.

On the other hand...

### ***Rich young ruler***

This guy had what I would deem a sincere deep-felt desire to follow Christ. I think this guy knew that the life he was living was empty. I think he knew that his pursuit of his own kingdom was leaving him empty. I think he knew something was missing from life. That life needed a new orientation, a new purpose. I think the same thing that drew Zacchaeus to Christ is what pulled this successful, wealthy, and religious man to Jesus. He had it all, but he wanted Jesus, too. And then in Mark 10:21, we read that a wealthy man ran up to Jesus and fell before him, asking what he must do to inherit eternal life.

"Jesus looked at him and loved him. 'One thing you lack,' he said. 'Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.'"

In other words, Jesus is saying, to follow me means a total restructuring of your life. A totally new purpose. A totally new way of living. And for you, begin by giving it all away. It wasn't a model that



Jesus was establishing, but it was the word of God challenging the heart of a person about the pursuit and purpose of his life.

But the man couldn't do it. His desire to follow Christ and his desire for riches were all tied up together, confused and I bet lonely. The text says, "...the man's face fell, and he went sadly away because he had many possessions." He couldn't reorient his life. He couldn't put the things of God before the stuff he had accumulated.

Perhaps the saddest example from Scripture is the story of the rich fool. The man who spent a lifetime building his farm business. The man who had it all... who in fact built bigger barns to have a place to hold all the pursuits of his life... his stuff. The man who then dies. He dies before the barns are even filled with his stuff. And Jesus summarizes this man's life by saying, "You fool!" You spent your life in pursuit of a kingdom that can't last. In pursuit of stuff that won't matter. In pursuit of stuff – and through that pursuit you lost what your life is really all about. You lost the purpose for which God created you. You fool!

**Question:** When you think about it, what's your treasure? Not what do you want it to be... but what is it?

- It may be your money... the pursuit of bigger balances at the bank.
- It may be your time... maybe the highest value in your life is the ability to control what you do with the time you've got.
- It may be your career... always working a new angle to get ahead. To stay on the upward climb.
- Maybe it's your car.
- Maybe it's eating out.
- Maybe it's your family... family can be a kingdom... a desire to keep the kids close... to pursue family at the cost of a kingdom perspective.
- Maybe it's sports... it's the Red Sox that win the day in your heart.
- For me... [fill in what yours is, in similar fashion to the example below]

Prestyn, my oldest child, only son, came home from school last week. His friend had been at their family cabin for the weekend. At school this friend had talked at length about the cabin in the mountains. Now I was 8 years old once, and I know that a cabin in the mountains is pretty tantalizing. To Prestyn, there is nothing quite like the thought of being in the mountains, at a rugged cabin.

As we talked about how exciting a cabin in the mountains would be, he looked at me and said, "Dad, you should buy a cabin... why don't you?" And that began a discussion of do I have enough money, what do I do with the money I am paid? How do we decide where to spend it and invest it?

Through it, I wanted my son to foster his dream for a cabin someday. That's good. But I also wanted him to see there were bigger dreams possible for his life. Bigger purposes. Bigger things he could invest his life in.

You see, I wanted him to learn that as good and fine as a cabin is – and who knows, someday the Siders might buy a cabin – but as good as that is, the truest treasure in heaven, the truest treasure that will last, is people. On the scales of God's economy are not cars and boats and houses. On the scales of God's economy are not our careers, or our sports, or how close our family lives to us. On the scales of God's economy are not success, status, and stuff. But rather when you look at the life of Jesus,

when you look at the history of God through the Old Testament you see that the prime emphasis of God through human history is people. For Jesus... significance and purpose... kingdom success came not from real estate and stock options, not from a career or the best sports tickets. Kingdom success came through people.

Jesus just invested a lot of his time in people. Jesus said, "I have come to seek and to save the lost." Jesus said, "I have not come to be served, but to serve people and to give my life as a ransom for many."

Jesus shared the Father's love and concern for people. It's what drove him to the cross. People are the only thing that will last. People are the only thing that will make it when time stops and history ceases.

And stewardship is all about chasing the things God chases. Investing our lives in God's purposes. It happens as I love and serve and touch and feed and clothe and seek and save and give. Stewardship happens when I live life with a divine commission to spend my life investing in people.

- It happens in the workplace, when I put the needs of the person in front of me before the bottom line.
- It happens in the home, when I seek to raise kids who love God and want to follow him, even when that means they could be called by God to something that pulls them away from me.
- It happens in the gas station, when I spend the extra time getting to know the attendant, and I care about him and his family as much as I do the price of gas. When I find out he's lonely and I give him value.
- It happens in my church, when I give my money, not to propagate a ministry, or as a ploy to get my way, but because that ministry touches the lives of people every day. And that matters.
- It happens in my neighborhood, when I live in such a way that people wonder what makes me different and I take the time to share the love of Christ with them.
- It happens when I go about normal life activities with the love of God for people at the forefront of my mind.

**Question:** What would happen... what would it look like for you... what changes would need to be made in your life for you to live like the Kingdom of God mattered above all the other stuff?

It probably would mean a brutally honest conversation with ourselves. An honest assessment of what we truly treasure in this world. It would probably mean a reorganization of how we invest what God has given to us... our time, our energy, our cars, our homes, our clothes, our money. Answering the question, how do I invest these in the Kingdom of God... in people?

**Question:** What needs to change in your life? What needs to happen to align your life with the Kingdom of God? With treasures that last?

What things do you treasure now that are getting in the way of eternal treasure and the purposes of God? Look at your calendar. Look at your bank statement. Look at your giving record. What do they say about your treasure?

Think about it for a moment. What would happen if we took the words of Christ seriously and churches all over North America did the same? What would it look like if thousands of followers of Christ began to sell off, give away, and trade in their treasures, so they could re-invest in God's greatest treasure? What if it actually happened?

## Week three: It's about provision

### Sermon outline

1. Introduction
2. Incredible truth: God provides what I need when I need it!
  - a. Genesis 11:30
  - b. Genesis 15:1-6
  - c. Genesis 17:1-2
    - i. All along they were learning the truth that God provides what I need – when I need it.
  - d. Genesis 22:1
    - i. Faith-filled response No. 1: Jump into action!
    - ii. Faith-filled response No. 2: Deep inside, trust God to work powerfully!
    - iii. Faith-filled response No. 3: Make a commitment and follow through.
    - iv. Hebrews 11:17-19
3. Conclusion

### Sermon text

As tiny babies, we look to someone bigger to provide for us, most likely our parents. We're dependent on them to see our needs and provide for all our basics like food, diaper changes, a warm place to sleep, and nurturing love. As a grade-schooler, our need for provision expands to homework help, after-school activities, and serious equipment like bicycles and skateboards. We trust our parents to see those needs and care enough to provide! By our teen years, the provision requirements swell to even more serious levels. And of course, adulthood brings a whole new league of needs. The reality of being "out on your own" to "fend for yourself" can be terrifying.

What tops your "need" list right now? Not your "toy" list or wish list of things that would simply be fun to have. I'm talking real needs. Go ahead and jot down one or two...

- Maybe you must find a new job – fast! – like yesterday.
- Maybe there's a stack of bills staring at you. Who knows how you'll pay them?
- Could be your car has 300,000 miles on it and is sputtering along on its last wheel.
- It may be a special ministry need – essential money for impacting others for Christ!
- Possibly your marriage needs serious help and restoration.
- You or someone you love may be facing a serious emotional crisis.

This morning we're going to discover this awesome truth: God provides what I need when I need it!

There was a couple in the Bible named Abram and Sarai. At the top of their "needs list" was one word: baby. God had made a special covenant with Abram. He called Abram to leave his home country and travel to a faraway land. God promised to abundantly bless Abram and transform his family into a humongous nation of people. There's a problem though... Genesis 11:30 tells us...

Sarai was not able to have any children. How in the world could they become a great nation full of people when they couldn't even have one baby? Years passed. Frustration mounted. Still no son to carry on the family line, start a tribe, and build a nation – like God had promised! God continued to make this outrageous promise to Abram that he would have a son and would become a great nation. Look at Genesis 15:1-6...

Abram showed real faith! What is faith? That's one of those pious-sounding, million-dollar words that gets flippantly thrown around when people are talking about religion or God or churchy stuff. But what is genuine faith? The real deal kind of faith is this: Making the choice to place my total trust in God's promise, and then obediently following his directions for my life.

When God's promise was real and Abram's faith was evident, God's timing was not so readily evident. Have you noticed how often life requires waiting and serious patience?

Most of us hate to wait. Patience is not our virtue, usually. In line at the grocery store... in the drive-thru line at Wendy's... I especially hate to wait at... [supply a humorous spot!]

Think about those items at the top of your "needs list." I'm guessing it seems like quite a wait and it's taking a lot of patience on your part! It was the same way for Abram and Sarai.

In fact, even though Abram had trusted God, the wait seemed unbearable, and just like we so often wobble in our faith, Abram and Sarai struggled. At one point Sarai felt such desperation to have a child that she took matters into her own hands and hatched a scheme without God's direction. Look at Genesis 16:1-3...

Notice it had been 10 long years since they entered the land. And Abram goes along with Sarai's idea for a surrogate. And it seemed at first their crazy plan had worked!

Hagar gets pregnant. But then as so often happens in life, Sarai decides that what she thought she wanted isn't really what she wanted after all. She and Hagar end up squabbling and jealousy erupts between them. You know, "three's a crowd," and that's certainly true in marriage. A son is born to Hagar and Abram, and they name him Ishmael. Look at Genesis 16:15-16...

Now notice chapter 17:1-2... Abram is now 99 years old! That's 13 more years of waiting! And God is still promising to make a great nation out of Abram!

God dialogues with Abram and changes his name to Abraham, which means "the father of many." And he changes Sarai's name to Sarah, which means "princess." People's names in the Bible often carried special significance. Their names often tell us something about their character – who they are, about God's intended purpose for them, and who they will become. Abraham will be the father of a nation, and Sarah will be the mother of royalty. Look at Genesis 17:16... kings will be among her descendants.

Catch Abraham's response in verse 17... He bows low and yet he laughs. He does the math. He's almost 100. Sarah's no spring chicken either – she's 90. He understands the basics of human biology and says, "Um, Lord, in case you haven't noticed, we're well past child-bearing years." Let's just stick with the "Ishmael plan." That's got to work!

God tells him, "I'm not kidding with you, Abraham." Catch verse 19. The name Isaac means "laughter." Abraham had laughed. Later on, when God breaks the news to Sarah, she laughs, too! But it's God who gets the last laugh. Remember, this is God, and nothing is too difficult for him! God had to have some fun with them. I love the Lord's sense of humor. "You're going to name this child 'Isaac' – laughter. So every time you call him for dinner, you're going to remember that you laughed at my ability to provide for you what I promised. Every time you call him by name to take out the trash or pick up his toys, you'll remember again how amazing and wonderful and powerful I am."

After Isaac was born to Abraham and Sarah, he filled their lives with joy and was the source of abundant laughter every day. They had seen God provide! Even after waiting for almost three decades, they

had seen God provide that top item on their “needs list.”

All along, they were learning... God provides what we need, when we need it!

What tops our need lists will be different for each of us, but the challenge of choice for each of us is the same. Will we respond in fear or will we respond in faith? Will we doubt God and try our own schemes or will we keep on trusting him and obeying him?

Do you remember the reality TV show “Fear Factor”? In the show, contestants were challenged with different frightening stunts, like climbing high beams between skyscrapers or eating bucketfuls of earthworms. The person who could complete all the death-defying, growth-defying challenges in the fastest time was dubbed the “Fear Factor Champion.” That person demonstrated an amazing level of boldness to press forward, face their fears, and not quit!

What’s your “Faith Factor?” Even though the wait is long, do you continue to hold on and trust God? Do you continue to persevere in following Christ, even when he doesn’t immediately solve your crisis, give you the dream job, miraculously pay the bills, or fix your marriage? Think about it. So often, the greatest provision we need from God is not exactly what we think we need. So much of the time, it’s not really an instant provision of that item at the top of our “needs list.” What we truly need is the character he forms in us as we wait to see him provide.

Building a great violin takes serious time and patience. Master violin makers look for the oldest wood available. They might salvage wood from a covered bridge built in 1866 in New Hampshire or gain wood from a 150-year-old table discovered in Alaska. As wood ages, it dries and becomes denser and more resonant. After the fronts and backs of the violins have been carved from the antique wood, the craftsman dries them in the sun at intervals for a year. Even then the aging process is not complete. Finished violins must be played over time to reach their full potential because playing them causes the wood to vibrate and become even more flexible, thus improving the tone quality and overall sound. Truly vintage, high-quality violins can cost between \$200,000 and \$3.5 million.

It’s in those waiting times that we are shaped into more flexible instruments with a richer tone to our lives. It’s there that we truly learn to trust God. It’s in waiting and struggling and even whining and stumbling that Abraham’s faith grew stronger and stronger! Works the same way in your life and mine today.

So look at your “needs list” for a minute. What if you have to keep waiting for the new car? What if it ends up taking a longer stretch of time to pay off that debt? What if the great job is still several jobs away? Could you realize that right here in your time of stressful waiting, God is growing your faith and your ability to press on in obeying him?

That’s not the end of the story though for Abraham and this precious son, Laughter.

One day, God tested Abraham’s faith again. Look at Genesis 22:1...

How many of you enjoy tests? Just mention the word and many of us break out in a cold sweat, our palms get sweaty, and we start to panic. Have you noticed how much of life seems like one test after another?

- Early in grade school... spelling tests.
- At 16 or 17... driving test.
- To get into college... placement tests.
- If you’re not feeling well... the doctor sends you for medical tests.



When is the last time you had to take a faith test? Abraham found himself facing a humongous faith test. Catch Genesis 22:2 (NLT)...

"Whoa! What in the world? You can't be serious, God? I thought we learned the lesson already: You provide what we need when we need it! We got it, God. And you gave us Isaac! Great – lesson learned – class dismissed! Right?"

Notice God's little jabs – "your only son – yes, Isaac, the one you love so much." What's God thinking? This is the son we've waited for, prayed for, hoped for, dreamed for, and then finally received. Life is so good! Sacrifice him – as a burnt offering? You've got to be kidding! I'm not laughing now Lord!

All these emotions must have flooded Abraham's heart and mind. Tests like this are no picnic. How do you respond to faith tests? Particularly faith tests involving God's provision?

- You commit to tithe to God faithfully, and your refrigerator croaks.
- You volunteer to serve as an adult helper with the junior high group on Wednesday nights, and then you're offered overtime with some sweet pay.
- God nudges you to start supporting a child through World Vision, but some months later you're not sure how all your own bills are going to be paid.

It's often through tests like this that our faith and obedience can grow stronger!

Abraham is faced with a whopper of a test. He shows us three faith-filled responses we can use to pass such faith tests in our own lives. Take a look at Genesis 22:3...

Faith-filled response No. 1: Jump into action!

Abraham didn't procrastinate, argue with God, drag his feet, or complain. He heard God's command, and he got moving promptly.

You know how this works with kids. Have you noticed they have boundless energy? Outrageous amounts of energy! I believe that energy is wasted on the young. They can still be bouncing off the walls at 9 p.m. But then tell them to pick up, get on their PJs, and brush their teeth. Suddenly, all energy is gone. "I'm soooo tired ... "

All too often, that's our response when God tests us in an area and calls us to give sacrificially and go to a new level of faith and obedience. Suddenly, we're slow to action.

A truly faith-filled, response involves jumping to action and saying, "Yes, I'll go for it and trust you, God!"

Look at verses 4-8...

Faith-filled response No. 2: Deep inside, trust God to work powerfully!

I love Abraham's confidence. "We will worship there, and then we will come right back." He already anticipated Isaac's return! And when Isaac asks him about the lamb, with faith-filled expectation, Abraham tells him, "God will provide a lamb, my son!" The word we see in our Bible as "provide" is actually much richer and picturesque in the ancient language. Abraham literally says, "God will see to it." It's the idea that God, as the loving, caring, strong Father, with eyes of gracious favor and compassion, will see our need and meet our need!

It's when we're tested that we've got to hold onto God's vision to see our need and meet our need!

Faith-filled response No. 3: Make a commitment and follow through.

Back in Genesis 22, catch verses 9-10...

There was no turning back for Abraham. He was ready to follow through. No shortcuts. No balking. Even though it was difficult, costly, and even dream crushing.

Now look at God's response... verses 11-19...

He tells Abraham to lay down the knife! God says, "Now I know... you've passed the test with flying colors! A+ for Abraham!" Hebrews 11:17-19 highlights why!

Abraham saw a ram caught in the bush and sacrificed it instead of Isaac! God had indeed provided! In fact, zero in on Genesis 22:14.

What a place to be! What a special spot! The events on this mountain on this dramatic day point toward an even more monumental moment. Hundreds of years later, another Son of Abraham would be sacrificed. The loving Heavenly Father saw our need for a lamb, and he provided. He saw our need for forgiveness, transformation, and eternal life. So he willingly sacrificed his precious only son, Jesus, in order to provide for our greatest need. Have you accepted God's wonderful provision of loving salvation through his son? Jesus came as the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world. (John 1:29)

The same God who saw our greatest need and provided salvation through sacrificing his son is able to see your everyday needs and meet those in phenomenal ways.

God provides what we need when we need it!

What's your faith factor? Are you jumping to action? Are you trusting him to work powerfully? Are you following through with the details?

## Week four: It's about me!

### Sermon outline

1. Introduction
2. Luke 12:13-21
  - a. Beware of greed.
  - b. Greed is subtle.
  - c. The rich man's attitude is it's all about himself!
  - d. The question is not, "Is it wrong to build a bigger house?"
  - e. The problem is he left out God.
3. Verse 21 – "Rich toward God."
  - a. Seeing everything as being on loan from God.
  - b. Seeking God's direction in my decisions.
  - c. Caring more about giving than getting.
  - d. Caring more about the Kingdom of God than about my "stuff."
4. Is it possible? It is about me?
  - a. Stewardship is about my accountability to God.
5. Conclusion

### Sermon text

Sometimes a little word can carry a lot of meaning. Consider this word, for example: Big. A simple word consisting of only one syllable – big. People in our day are preoccupied with bigness. The serving sizes of our meals here in the U.S. are known to be much bigger than those across the globe. We're preoccupied with bigness.

There is a place in Minneapolis, Minnesota, that is big. It's called the Mall of America.

The Mall of America is 5.6 million square feet – large enough to merit its own ZIP code. The mall welcomes more than 32 million visitors a year. That's more visitors than Epcot, Graceland, and the Grand Canyon combined! Mall of America used to be able to make the claim as biggest mall on earth – until recently.

Iran Mall, located in Tehran, Iran, is the largest mall in the world. The largest entertainment and shopping center anywhere. It has 2,500 stores and could fit almost 400 football fields. It's almost four times bigger than the Mall of America. Big.

In our Scripture today we will learn about big – and bigger.

Read Luke 12:13-21.

Some of Jesus' teachings are hard to understand. You have to ponder and think deeply to figure out the meaning. Not so with this one! The main point is perfectly clear. Beware of greed!

Greed. One of the seven deadly sins as listed by Pope Gregory the Great at the end of the sixth century.

Greed. The desire for just a little more – and then more – and more and more and more.

Let's look at this scripture carefully, with minds open to all God wants to say to us today.

Read verse 13: "Someone in the crowd said to him (Jesus), 'Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.'"

Exactly what lies behind this appeal, we do not know. But there was disagreement and conflict between two brothers. That much is just like our world today. Every Sunday in church there could be told stories of conflict and alienation between friends or family members. “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” It was customary in those days for a person with a dispute to go to a well-known rabbi for mediations.

Verse 14: “Jesus replied, ‘Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?’” Jesus would have been well qualified to settle the dispute – more qualified than anyone else on the face of the earth. But he stays focused on his main mission – to announce the good news of the Kingdom of God and to prepare to die as a sacrifice for our sins. So he will not enter into arbitration with this man and his brother.

Verse 15: “Then he (Jesus) said to them...”

We assume “them” refers to the crowd – which is mentioned in verse 1 of this chapter: A crowd of many thousands had gathered. However, G. Campbell Morgan gives his opinion that “them” refers to the man who asked the question and his brother. (Studies in the Four Gospels, page 153.) Morgan assumes both men were standing there when the issue was raised by the one brother. That would certainly have brought electricity to the air at that moment. Verse 15 continues. “Then he said to them, ‘Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed...’ All kinds of greed.

### ***Greed is subtle.***

Here we learn greed is subtle. It shows up in clever disguise – not only in obvious ways, but also in unexpected ways and places. It shows up not only in others, but also in you and me. The biblical teaching on money has several aspects to it.

One part of that teaching says there is a dark side to money. It is not a neutral commodity. It has a power that is demonic in character. It takes on the nature of a god. It can weaken or destroy your relationship with the true God. So the Bible gives many warnings about the evil money can do. Back to verse 15: “Be on your guard against all kinds of greed...”

A man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. This statement by Jesus flies in the face of our culture – even our church culture. In our culture a mall with thousands of stores is described as a great opportunity, not as a sinful distraction to the well-being of our soul.

Abundance of possessions. Richard Foster, a Quaker writer and renewal leader, said that an important thing for North American Christians to do is look at the global picture and stop denying that we are wealthy.

- If you own a car, you are in the world’s upper class.
- If you own a home, you are richer than 95% of all the people on this planet.
- If you own a book, you are wealthy. If you have a library of several books, you are extremely wealthy.

This is not intended to make you feel guilty; it is intended to help you gain an accurate assessment of your real situation in the global scene. Foster further observes, “It is only as we admit our wealth and quit trying to run from it that we are in a position to conquer it and use it for God’s good purposes,” (Money, Sex and Power, page 33).

C.S. Lewis said to the church: “You and I have need of the strongest spell that can be found to wake us up from the evil enchantment of worldliness,” (from “The Weight of Glory”). Some of us have so many

possessions that we rent storage space somewhere to keep our extra stuff. So to every modern person who has more stuff than he knows what to do with, Jesus says, “Wake up! Your life does not consist in having a lot of things.” Well then, what does life consist of?

### ***A right relationship with God and others.***

Well, as I understand the Bible, the answer to that question is this: Life consists of relationships and choices – a right relationship with God and others, and a right use of the gifts God has given. We will return to this idea in a few minutes. The story in Luke 12 continues.

Verses 16-19: “And he told them this parable: The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I’ll say to myself, you have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.’”

So far, the man sounds like the average laborer or professional person who has worked for 45 years and has a reasonable retirement package. He sounds like someone who set high goals for himself – raising the bar and further developing his success. But let’s look at the story again. What is the obvious feature about the man’s pep talk to himself? It is his use of personal pronouns: I, my, and myself. There’s more “I” in this man’s speech than in any other parable Jesus told. The rich man’s attitude is this.

It’s all about me!

William Barclay, Bible scholar from England, said: “The man’s whole attitude was the reverse of Christianity” (The Gospel of Luke, page 168). When the man asked, “What am I to do with all my increase?” it never entered his mind to give any of it away. It’s all about me – which is a fatal philosophy, as we shall see. In the man’s comments we meet up with an important word.

I began this message by referring to the word “big” – and now we meet the word again, this time in its comparative form. Bigger. Bigger crops mean bigger barns. If big is good, bigger is better. All of which leads to an important question.

### ***Is it wrong to build a bigger house or barn?***

The question is this: Is it wrong to build a bigger house or barn? We hope not, because if it is wrong, then many (maybe most) of the people in this room are in deep trouble with God. And as I understand the Bible, the answer to this question is: Maybe yes, maybe no. So much depends on the attitude of the heart. What about the attitude of this man’s heart? Verse 20: “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’” So here we learn about the inner life of this man.

He had a big problem: He left God out of his life. He was totally self-sufficient – or so he thought. He should have remembered Deuteronomy 8, which says: “When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God... remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth...” (verses 10, 11, and 18). So God has a word for this man:

You fool! You have left me out of your thinking. You have lived for this life only instead of living in light of eternity. So your life is over, as of now.

There's an old phrase: He who dies with the most toys wins. We know this is not true. He who dies with the most toys still dies – and takes no toys with him. A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. Randy Alcorn, in his book, "The Treasure Principle," points out that we will part with our money. The only question is when. You can't take it with you – but can send it on ahead.

We come now to the closing line of Jesus' parable. Verse 21: "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God." This is how it will be with anyone, not just this particular farmer. Do you remember the main point of this Scripture? It appeared back in verse 15: Beware of greed! And here we learn an important thing about greed.

### ***Greed brings God's judgment.***

Greed is no small thing. It has serious consequences – deadly consequences – eternal consequences. Greed brings God's judgment. This is how it will be for anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.

Rich toward God – let's think about what that phrase might mean. First, it involves a whole new idea of ownership. It means seeing everything I "own" as being on loan from God himself – and seeing myself as accountable to God for how I manage his gifts and resources. As Randy Alcorn says, "We don't own the store. We just work here!"

The man in the parable did not attempt to ask God what he should do with his life or his newly acquired wealth. In contrast to that, the God-honoring person seeks God's will for all of life's decisions, including decisions about money. It is natural to want to get good things for yourself. But Jesus calls us to a new and higher way of living – to live for others – to find joy in giving. To be rich toward God means I care more about giving than getting. To quote Randy Alcorn again, he offers this principle to live by: "God prospers me not to raise my standard of living, but to raise my standard of giving."

### ***Caring more about the Kingdom of God than about increasing my material possessions.***

Jesus calls us to seek first the Kingdom of God. No one claims that is an easy thing to do! There are so many competing interests. But if I call out to God, he can work a deep inner change in me, so that I will care more about the Kingdom of God than about increasing my own material possessions. Martin Luther said: "I have held many things in my hands and have lost them all; but whatever I have placed in God's hands, that I still possess."

We have been seeing that the Bible warns about the dark side of money and wealth.

But that is not the only word in the Bible on these subjects.

### ***There is a bright side to money.***

The Bible also teaches there is another side to money – a light or good side. Money, or wealth, is also regarded as a blessing from God, as we saw in the verses from Deuteronomy. Money can be used to bless other people and, even more startling, can be a means of enhancing our relationship with God! So, let's think about the opposite of greed. What would you say is the opposite of greed? Here's one answer: Contentment.

Contentment. The Apostle Paul lived a life of contentment, as he describes in Philippians 4:12. "I've learned by now to be quite content whatever my circumstances. I'm just as happy with little as with



much, with much as with little. I've found the recipe for being happy whether full or hungry, hands full or hands empty."

Contentment. G.K. Chesterton said: "There are two ways to get enough: One is to continue to accumulate more and more. The other is to desire less." If that attitude spreads, it will kill the advertising industry! Anthony Mello, a priest from India, tells this story. A rich industrialist from North India was horrified to find a southern fisherman lying leisurely beside his boat.

"Why aren't you fishing?" asked the industrialist.

"Because I've caught enough fish for the day," said the fisherman.

"Why don't you catch some more?" asked the industrialist.

"What would I do with them?" the fisherman replied.

"You could earn more money," said the industrialist. "With that you could fix a motor on your boat, go into deeper waters, and catch more fish. Then you would make enough to buy nylon nets. Those would bring you more fish and more money. Soon you would have enough money to own two boats – maybe even a fleet of boats. Then you would be a rich man like me."

"What would I do then?"

"Then you could really enjoy life."

And the fisherman said, "What do you think I am doing right now?" Contentment – the opposite of greed. Here is another opposite of greed.

### **Generosity.**

Generosity. Finding delight in giving your money away to bless others, help the poor, and help spread the Gospel. Giving is a spiritual activity, even a part of spiritual warfare. Gordon Cosby, founder of the Church of the Saviour in Washington, D.C., has said that "to give away money is to win a victory over the dark powers that oppress us."

How much do you give away? And with what attitude? You do not have to go on living in the grip of greed. You can live in contentment and generosity.

### ***It's all about me!***

Here again is the philosophy of the man in this parable. It's all about me – a deadly philosophy – in his case, literally. But let's look at his philosophy with different eyes. Is there anything that can be redeemed out of this philosophy? Any way of looking at it in a positive way? I think there is. Stewardship is a matter of managing all of life under the lordship of Christ.

So, in the highest level of meaning, "It's about me" means that it's up to me to manage my life and my resources for God. No one else can do it for me. I am directly responsible for the choices I make. Stewardship is all about my accountability to God.

I can manage my life for self and things – and miss out on everything that is worthwhile. Or I can manage my life for God and his kingdom purposes – and find joy and fulfillment that will last forever. It's up to me. It's up to you. What are you doing with your life?

As you walk through life, you will find many things clamoring for your attention and your money. Greed may shout at you in obvious ways: Through the increase of your wealth or as you walk through the mall.

Or it may whisper to you in more subtle ways. But because of the Spirit of Christ living in you, you don't have to live for things. You can live for the Kingdom of God, which is eternal. So, how are we going to respond to the messages we have found in the parable of the rich fool? Here are two questions to guide your thinking:

**What is God saying to me about greed?** "Beware of greed" is God's warning to everyone. But this is also a personal question and only you can answer it for yourself. I am sure that if you ask this question sincerely, God will have something to say to you.

**What steps can I take to be rich in God's sight?** I suggested four things this might mean, and there may be other things that God will say to you. Because you live in middle class North America, you have some tremendous opportunities to bless other people with your wealth. God gets personal when he speaks to us, so don't be surprised if he tells you some very specific and definite things to do with your money, your things, and your life – all of which, remember, came from God. Ask him to make you rich in his sight, rich in the things that really matter in the Kingdom of God.



## Worship service resources

## Week one: It's about God

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Traditional worship service outline

**Prelude**

**Welcome and opening**

**Worship in song** (hymns that emphasize God is the only true God, worthy of worship and the sacrifice of our entire lives)

*Praise to the Lord, the Almighty*

*Fairest Lord Jesus*

**Scripture reading**

Matthew 6:24-34

**Prayer**

**Offering**

Instrumental solo of *Seek Ye First*

**Worship in song** (hymns that emphasize personal dedication and commitment to God)

**Message** "It's about God!"

**Benediction**

**Postlude**

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Contemporary worship service outline

**Prelude**

**Worship in song**

*You're Worthy of My Praise* by David Ruis

*Praise to the Lord, the Almighty* (hymn with band groove)

*Hallelujah (Your Love is Amazing)* by Brenton Brown

**Welcome and opening**

**Scripture reading** (dramatic reading, as a monologue)

Matthew 6-24-34 (The Message)

**Worship in song**

*You Alone* by David Crowder

*Fairest Lord Jesus*

*Enough* by Chris Tomlin

*Breathe* by Marie Barnett

**Prayer**

**Message** "It's about God!"

**Offering**

*I Give You My Heart* by Reuben Morgan

**Benediction**

*I Give You My Heart* (band reprise)

**Postlude**

## Week two: It's about purpose

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### Traditional worship service outline

#### **Prelude**

#### **Welcome and opening**

#### **Worship in song**

*Praise My Soul the King of Heaven*

#### **Scripture**

Idea: Read scriptures relating to God's faithfulness

#### **Prayer**

#### **Worship in song**

*Great Is Thy Faithfulness*

*Make Me a Blessing*

#### **Offering**

#### **Worship in song**

*Lord of the Good*

#### **Message "It's about purpose"**

#### **Response**

*O God of Love Who Gave Us Life*

*Take My Life and Let It Be*

#### **Unison prayer**

*Make Us Willing to Share*

#### **Benediction**

#### **Postlude**

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### Contemporary worship service outline

#### **Prelude**

#### **Worship in song**

*Come Now Is the Time to Worship* by Brian Doerksen

*Come Let Us Adore Him*

#### **Prayer of invocation and welcome**

#### **Worship in song**

*Here I Am to Worship*

*Agnes Dei* by Michael W. Smith

*Breathe* by Hillsong Worship

*Hungry* by Kathryn Scott

#### **Prayer**

Consider having the praise team or a soloist sing "*Great is Thy Faithfulness*" as part of the prayer time. Scriptures about God's faithfulness could also be quoted during this time. Allow sufficient time for thoughtful response. Do not be afraid of silence.

#### **Offering**

#### **Message "It's about purpose"**

#### **Worship in song**

Have the praise team lead in one or two numbers that help the people respond to the sermon.

Close with a prayer of commitment.

#### **Postlude**

## Week three: It's about provision

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### Traditional worship service outline

#### Prelude

#### Welcome

Unison scripture reading of Psalm 33: 20-22: "We wait in hope for the Lord; He is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. May your unfailing love rest upon us, O Lord, even as we put our hope in you."

#### Worship in song

*O God, Our Help in Ages Past*

#### Responsive reading

Psalm 121, NRSV

#### Worship in song

*My Hope is Built*

#### Scripture

Psalm 46:1-3, 10

#### Prayer

#### Offertory

*Be Thou My Vision*

#### Reading: two readers or a group of readers split up the parts for the desired effect

Part 1: The world says: "Be sure you get what's coming to you."

Part 2: The Word says: "Life doesn't consist of what you possess."

Part 1: The world says: "Spend and accumulate goods."

Part 2: The Word says: "Give and you will develop character."

Part 1: The world says: "Wealth is a person's security."

Part 2: The Word says: "Refuge in God is our security."

Part 1: The world says: "You deserve the best."

Part 2: The Word says: "God deserves the best."

Part 1: The world says: "Give so that you may obtain favor from others."

Part 2: The Word says: "Give because you have received favor from God."

Part 1: The world says: "Seek your own gratification."

Part 2: The Word says: "Offer to God your gratitude."

#### Worship in song

*When We Walk with the Lord*

#### Faith story

Have someone in your congregation share their personal journey of God's provision as it relates to the message. Their story should not be any longer than 3-5 minutes or it will lose its effectiveness.

#### Message "It's about provision"

#### Worship in song

*It is Well with My Soul*

#### Benediction

I thank my God every time I remember you... being confident of this, that he who began good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer: That your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ – to the glory and praise of God.

#### Postlude



## Week three: It's about provision

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### Contemporary worship service outline

#### **Prelude**

*All For You*, by Paul Baloche and Lenny LeBlanc

#### **Welcome**

#### **Worship in song**

*You Shine* by Brian Doerksen

#### **Scripture**

Psalms 121

#### **Worship in song**

*I Lift My Eyes Up* by Brian Doerksen

*Blessed Be Your Name* by Matt and Beth Redman

*I Will Lift My Hands* by Bruce Ellis

#### **Prayer**

#### **Offertory**

*I Will Sing* by Don Moen

*When It's All Been Said and Done* by Jim Cowan

#### **Faith story**

Have someone in your congregation share their personal journey of God's provision as it relates to the message. Have them type up and read what they are going to say. Aim for 3-5 minutes. Their faith story should not be any longer than this or it will lose its effectiveness.

#### **Message** "It's about provision"

#### **Response**

Time of guided prayer where the pastor leads in a prayer for those who wish to accept Christ; for people who wish to thank God for ways He has provided in their lives; and finally for people to list one area they are asking God to work powerfully in their lives.

#### **Worship in song**

*It Is Well with My Soul*

#### **Benediction**

I thank my God every time I remember you... being confident of this, that he who began good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer: That your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God

#### **Postlude**

## Week four: It's about me!

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### Traditional worship service outline

#### **Prelude**

#### **Welcome**

#### **Worship in song**

*Blessed Be the Lord God Almighty*

*I Sing the Mighty Power of God*

#### **Scripture**

Nehemiah 9:5

#### **Worship in song**

*All Creatures of Our God and King*

#### **Prayer**

Directed prayer with sentence prayers from congregation blessing the Lord for his faithfulness.

#### **Faith story**

What God has taught us through this emphasis on stewardship. Sharing may be a few pre-selected individuals or an open "testimony" style. Remind congregation about the ABCs of sharing: Applicable to theme, brief, Christ-centered.

#### **Offering**

#### **Worship in song**

*Come All Christians Be Committed*  
*Thou joy of Loving Hearts*

*We Give Thee But Thine Own*  
*A Charge to Keep*

#### **Message "It's about me!"**

#### **Worship in song**

*Take My Life and Let It Be*

#### **Benediction**

#### **Postlude**

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### Contemporary worship service outline

#### **Prelude**

#### **Welcome**

#### **Worship in song**

*God of Wonders* by Third Day  
*Beautiful One* by Jeremy Camp

*Shout to the Lord* by Darlene Zschech  
*Famous One* by Chris Tomlin

#### **Offering**

*It's All About You* by Rick Muchow of Saddleback

#### **Prayer**

#### **Faith story**

What God has taught us through this emphasis on stewardship. Sharing may be a few pre-selected individuals or an open "testimony" style. Remind congregation about the ABCs of sharing: Applicable to theme, brief, Christ-centered.

#### **Message "It's about me!"**

#### **Worship in song**

*It's All About You* by Rick Muchow

*Be the Centre* by Michael Frye

#### **Postlude**



## Prayer strategy

### **An hour of prayer**

*Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter: "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."*

Matthew 26:40-41 (NIV)

A one-hour prayer vigil is something you can do corporately or individually. The following outline can be used as a guide. The times are arbitrary and can be adjusted to your personal context. It may be helpful to schedule a corporate/personal one-hour prayer time before 30 Days of Generosity begins and another at the midpoint of the series.

### **Options for implementation:**

1. Have a one-hour prayer time two weeks before you begin the series and schedule another for the second week of the series. This could be done as an entire congregation in a corporate manner. It is likely that not everyone will be able to attend, but knowing about it allows people to be praying in advance, which builds momentum, increases ownership, and helps move people into a posture that seeks the heart of God.
2. Have a sign-up sheet for people and provide the information below as a tool for them to use anytime during the week. Ask your congregation for a specific number of people to commit to praying for one hour before the series begins and one hour in the middle of the series.
3. Church staff could commit to a one-hour prayer time in regards to the series.
4. Whatever other idea you can come up with that results in people praying about God's work through the 30 Days of Generosity series.





## Bulletin inserts



## Week 1

# It's about God

### 30 Days of Generosity

Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no store-room or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?

– *Luke 12:24-26 (NIV)*

**Praise:** God knows! God is present! God is powerful and he cares. Our needs matter to him because he loves us.

**Thanksgiving:** God replenishes the Earth, providing for the plants and animals. He provides even more for us, his children.

**Cleansing:** May God forgive our unbelief and ingratitude.

**Requests:** Focus our spiritual vision on you, Lord. Set our hearts and minds on eternal things. Remind us, God, of your greatness, faithfulness, and love. May your word strengthen our faith as we learn to know you better and trust you more.



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## Week 2

# It's about purpose

## 30 Days of Generosity

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.  
– *Romans 8:28 (NIV)*

**Praise:** God is good! God's promises never fail. We see God reigning victoriously over the gates of hell as individual believers gain spiritual ground and his church continues marching forward.

**Thanksgiving:** Thank God for his many promises. Name some you are claiming and holding on to right now. Thank God for his faithfulness to his word and for his perfect provision.

**Cleansing:** Invite God to remove fear and doubt. Ask for his forgiveness and mercy in regard to times and places where we have strayed from his path – both individually and corporately.

**Request:** God, fill our leaders with a spirit of faith and wisdom to guide us according to your purpose. Lord, grant us faith to believe your word and give us the strength to take bold steps of obedience.



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## Week 3

# It's about provision

## 30 Days of Generosity

And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

– 2 *Corinthians* 9:8 (NIV)

**Praise:** God is able! We are very blessed. We have received all kinds of resources to offer back to God in worship. Give glory to God for ways that he is making his grace abound in our lives.

**Thanksgiving:** Thank the Lord for his forgiveness, and for every other spiritual gift we have received through Christ. Thank him for family, friends and our community of faith. Thank him for all of our material blessings.

**Cleansing:** Let us open our hearts and minds to allow the Holy Spirit to show us areas where we've blocked God's provision for us. Let us also examine our lives to see if we have distorted any of God's good provision and permitted it to be a stumbling block to others or us.

**Requests:** Lord, we eagerly desire your best. We know every good gift comes from you and you only give good gifts to your children, therefore fill us with your Spirit and grant us full and abundant lives, in every way, in Christ Jesus.



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## Week 4

# It's about me!

## 30 Days of Generosity

Therefore, my dear siblings, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.  
– 1 Corinthians 15:58 (NIV)

**Praise:** We are fearfully and wonderfully formed! God's wisdom and power are displayed through us and we have hope and a future. God wants us with him for all eternity.

**Thanksgiving:** Give thanks for things like health, strength, vision, talents and the ability to read and reason. Thank God for things like love, art, music, humor, athletics and spirituality.

**Cleansing:** May God free us from the tyranny of the flesh. Let's agree that our natural desires will be subject to God's will. Seek forgiveness, healing and restoration for any unresolved "issues" between us and God, or us and other people.

**Requests:** Lord, we want to be more like you. In your great love, wisdom, and strength, heal us, shape us, equip us and move us to bring you glory with our lives. Bless us so we may bless others.



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