

**Open: A Generous Life**  
Glen - Mar 4, 2018

**Series Big Idea:** The very best life possible, this side of heaven, is found through a key characteristic - generosity. Generosity is a matter of our character. It is also tied to our actions and practice. Jesus said that if you want to experience the blessings of God, you'll only experience them to the degree you learn to be generous. His exact words were: "It is more blessed to give than receive." This more blessed life surprisingly leads us to the heart of God (grace) and protects us from devil's scheme to rob us of the most blessed life (greed).

**Message Big Idea:** In Acts 20 we encounter Paul's last words to a group of men he dearly loved. His carefully chosen words remind us of the path to a more blessed life. The best life possible begins with a relationship with Jesus. That relationship opens our heart from being greedy to being generous. A generous life is open, not constricted, and it flows from and helps us embrace God's grace. A generous life protects us from greed which will rob us of all the good God wants for us. A generous life is discovered as we give to God and others. It is only through a generous life that we'll discover how to be truly blessed.

**Main Idea:** The open life opens us to the best life.

**Main Text:** Acts 20:32-38

**Reflection/Discussion Questions:**

1. Glen describes the "open life" as the generous life and the "closed life" as one dominated by greed. How would you assess yourself in the following areas? Are you more open or closed regarding: 1) money, 2) possessions, 3) time, 4) love, and 5) service.
2. Glen talked about the lies that form our greed. We are tempted to believe the lie that the more we get and keep the more blessed we are. We also believe that there isn't going to be enough of whatever, so we keep and protect it for ourselves. How do you experience the temptation of greed or in what areas do you recognize the tendency to be greedy?
3. An open, generous heart is not possible unless it is opened by gratitude. Describe your level or condition of gratitude or lack of gratitude now. What hinders you from being grateful? What are you grateful for right now? How can you grow your gratitude?
4. Do you practice open, generous giving to the Lord? Describe what you do (not amounts) or don't do and be honest regarding the why. How do you want to grow your generosity?
5. Describe your experience with Glen's main point: *The open life opens us to the best life.*

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**Main Idea:** The open life opens us to the best life.

**Message:** Our words matter. But our last words really matter. As we are saying a farewell and goodbye, those words matter and will be remembered. The last words of a soldier to his or her spouse or parent as they are being deployed matter and carry a weight more than just saying goodbye when off to work. If we, and those we love, know that we are in our final days on earth, then what we do and what we say takes on immense meaning. If we know we only have a few days or months left, then those words become the most valuable of our entire life. I will often try to help people who know they are dying realize that every word they speak in the days, weeks or months they have left carry extra weight. The words they say in their final season will be heard and listened to more carefully than at any other time in their life. Many of you have experienced that and hold on to those words. That's actually what was happening in a story in the Bible regarding the Apostle Paul that we are going to look at today.

God called Paul to be a special apostle or missionary to take the news of Jesus beyond the Jewish people to the Gentiles or non-Jews. God used Paul to write a good portion of our New Testament - a total of 13 of our New Testament books. Today I want us to see the last words he spoke to a group of leaders that he had become very close to. We are going to see Paul say some profound things at his final face to face time he had with them.

And here's what's interesting to me. His final words are an encouragement to live a generous life, an open life. He wants them to be open with all that God has given them and to share it with others. He wants to remind them how our generous God opens our hearts so we will open our hands to give to others. For Paul, it is the real mark of what it means to follow Jesus. So today we are going to begin a short series that we are calling *Open*. We are going to look at what it means to have an open heart that allows us to have open, generous hands. And here's my point today - **The open life opens us to the best life.** Now, that phrase "the best life" has been so misused and hijacked. There are Christians who use that phrase - "the best life" to mean a life of financial prosperity and a life without problems. That is NOT what I mean. I call it the best life because it is a life shaped and formed by God. When God is square in the middle of our life - that is the best life. We'll explore and unpack this more.

The Apostle Paul spent about 3 years with a church he started in a town called Ephesus. This is a city in what is modern day Turkey. He left Ephesus to do his third missionary journey into Greece. On his way back, he stops at a port near Ephesus and calls the elders, who are the leaders of the church, to come see him before he continues back to Jerusalem. This will be the last time he is with them in person. Let's read Acts 20:32-38 (pg. 760 - NIV) - <sup>32</sup> ***"Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. <sup>33</sup> I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. <sup>34</sup> You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. <sup>35</sup> In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of***

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**hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'** ” <sup>36</sup> **When Paul had finished speaking, he knelt down with all of them and prayed.** <sup>37</sup> **They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him.** <sup>38</sup> **What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship.**

These guys were close. They had faced hard times and persecution together. They saw God do amazing miraculous things together. Paul introduced them to Jesus and they experienced the power of God that changed their lives. They were very grateful to Paul. Their love was deep.

Remember, these were Paul's last words and they were carefully chosen. He reminded them of the best life possible. The best life possible is a generous life. It is an open life. **The open life opens us to the best life.** Lets look more carefully at what he said.

First, notice what Paul said in vs. 32. **Grace opens - Acts 20:32** - ***“Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.*** Grace opens our hearts and lives. Grace is the source of being generous. Grace is the key to experiencing the best or blessed life. Put in the negative - you'll never have an open heart and open hands that are generous until your heart is opened by and filled with grace. God's grace is this - he loves us, is for us, is with us and he wants the very best for us and had already done everything to show that and provide that. He gave us Jesus. He gave us the full rights of being his very own children. He gave us salvation and forgiveness. He gave us the hope of life after death. He gave us the Holy Spirit to guide us. He gave us the Bible to guide us. He gave us each other. He gave us life. He gave and gave and gave and keeps on giving. In God we ARE blessed! In God we HAVE the best life! And this is what this means. If you struggle to be open and generous, then I'll 100% guarantee you that you don't really get or experience God's grace. Being generous means we are filled with grace so we can give grace. This is where we start to become more open!

Second, Paul knows the great danger we face when we live a closed life. It is greed and it closes our heart to God and others. **Greed closes - Acts 20:33-34** - <sup>33</sup> ***I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing.*** <sup>34</sup> ***You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions.*** Paul worked hard at making sure greed never controlled him. He worked a “second job” to support himself and give to others.

We all battle greed. None of us, including me, is exempt. Greed is based on a couple of lies from the Devil that we believe and act on. The first lie is this - the more I get and keep, the happier I'll be. The more I get and keep for myself the better and more blessed my life will be. But the spiritual fact and reality is that the more I get and keep for myself, the more closed I am to my generous God. The second lie is that there will never be enough of... and you fill in the blank. Not enough time, not enough energy, not enough money, not enough love. So then we buy the lie that because there is not

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enough, we think we have to keep what little there is for ourselves and that will bless us. Nope! That too is greed and it will ruin us.

Jesus knew the danger of greed. And Jesus teaches that the best antidote to greed is in giving. So in verse 35 Paul reminds us what Jesus said: ***“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”*** **More blessed to give than receive - Jesus (Acts 20:35)** This is the only place where these words of Jesus are recorded. But they were powerful words that actually shaped how Paul lived. Paul devoted himself to helping others. And using the word Jesus used- Paul wanted to bless others through his giving. This is what Paul wants us to live and experience - **The open life opens us to the best life.**

Jesus wants us to be “blessed.” Blessed is a Bible word. It is a word that folks use at church. You don’t heard the average person use it in daily conversation. What does the word blessed mean? The Greek word for blessed is *makarios* which means to be fully satisfied, fortunate or happy. It refers to those receiving God’s favor, regardless of their circumstances. It isn’t, as many church people think, having financial prosperity. One can be blessed and have almost nothing in terms of financial means! It doesn’t mean never having problems or struggles. In the most difficult of experiences we can experience God’s blessings. That’s a whole sermon in itself!

So I believe the best definition of blessed is this - it’s the best life possible! Think about the things that will make your life or anyone’s life the best possible. Content, secure, happy, loved, accepted, peace, hope, purpose, protected, respected, meaningful, and so on. Everything I just mentioned is ONLY possible through God. The world, people and our culture can’t guarantee any of those things I mentioned! The blessed life, the best life possible, is only found in and through God. The blessed life is the life God always intended for us which sin has messed up.

And that brings us right back to the point I’m trying to make today - **The open life opens us to the best life.** Jesus said the best life is all about giving, not getting. So how do we get to having an open life that opens us up the blessed life?

I want to end my teaching, as always, by looking at some practical ways to grow an open life of generosity. An open and generous life always starts with gratitude for all the grace God has given. A truly grateful heart can’t help but be an open and generous heart. I’ve already mentioned some of the big things of grace for which we can be grateful for. Here’s the deal - there is SO MUCH to be grateful for that there is NEVER a lack of things for which we can be continually grateful for. You have to decide if you want to recognize them and celebrate them. Will you be intentionally grateful?

Next, Jesus says that THE path to a blessed life is in giving. And the Bible consistently teaches a principle that we are to give first and generously to God. Giving doesn’t stop there. It starts there. The principle is called the tithe. God gave us this principle to open your heart to him. Here’s how this principle works. We give to the Lord first. When we get paid, we give to him first before anything else is taken care of. And we give

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generously to the Lord first. The Old Testament law of tithing required that a person give to God the first 10% of their income. But there is more here. When you choose to give God the first 10% then you also have to trust God to be able to live on the 90%. Giving opens our hearts to trust God! The ironic thing about tithing is that it is more for our benefit than God's need. He's not broke! The question is this - is our heart open to him?

I know that people get uncomfortable when the pastor of the church talks about money. I get it. First, let me be clear. I'm not asking you to give today because we are in financial need. In fact, this gives me an opportunity to say thank you. You all have been so generous. Currently, your giving is 5% above what you gave last year at this time and last year was a record! Thank you for being generous! That has allowed us to be generous to so many ministries, churches and missions. I love that our church is generous and open and we give away lots of money, people and share our resources. With our Christmas Eve offering and Feed My Starving Children we gave away almost \$100,000! My point is that I'm not talking about this out of our need. I'm talking about giving because that is your need and my need to be generous. You and I need to give because... **The open life opens us to the best life.**

Some folks look for loopholes. They say, "Well, the New Testament doesn't command the tithe, so I don't have to tithe. They they are partially right. Does that surprise you? It's just like the Sabbath, the tithe or any Old Testament law. We are not under the obligation of the Old Testament laws. A month ago I said we are not under the Sabbath law. But I also said that the principle of rest is valid. We need regular rest and Jesus said we needed rest. Jesus, nor the apostles, command us to tithe. It is because Jesus and his disciples assumed we would tithe and said our right doing should exceed what the Old Testament required (See Matthew 5:20). We are not commanded to tithe, but out of gratitude we are instructed in the New Testament to give generously and to choose to go beyond what the old laws required. If we are to become generous givers we want to aim for at least 10%. But we might start at 1%. Or we might start at 25%!

I want you to hear **Nick and Laura Farr**. I try to find folks who are living out what we are talking about. Many of you know Nick as he's one of our teaching pastors and Nick and Laura sings on our worship team. Thank you both for joining us today to talk about a topic that lots of people don't like to talk about - tithing. I want us, as a church, to be able to understand how vital tithing or regular giving is for our own benefit and how it opens our heart. **So let me start by asking this: Have you always tithed and have you been consistent in your tithing?**

**Laura, talk to us about your fear and describe what was going on in your heart that kept you from being generous for that season.**

**How has giving opened your heart to God and others?**

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Thank you both for being vulnerable and transparent. If you are not tithing, I'm asking you to trust God and give to him first. I challenge you to start at 10%, but start somewhere! And watch your heart open to God and to others.

So the starting point in giving is to create and sustain an open heart by giving to God first on a consistent basis. We give or tithe as we receive our income. Do that however works best for you. Some folks love to write a check. They like to physically give their gift to God. That's great! Others like to have their tithe automatically deducted from their checking - it's called ACH. That's okay too. But I also want to encourage you to give online or with our mobile app. I want you to know that I believe it is one of the best ways to give. Here's why. You set up the automatic schedule and you don't forget! It helps you be more consistent in your giving. It is easy to change or pause if you need to. I want to encourage all of us to begin to give electronically as we are considering eliminating having to pass the offering buckets. Not because we don't want people to give, but that practice is often misunderstood by those visiting - the very people we are trying to reach and who don't know yet that we are a church with high financial integrity and very generous.

So the principles of the tithe are to give to God first, give regularly and give generously. How you give is your choice and you can go to our web page to get help in figuring out which method you want to use. If you have questions about how to use auto deduction, online giving or our mobile app, we have a team at Launching Point, or room 3 off the courtyard, to help you go digital. If you need help with your finances, we have lots of tools and help for you to get your finances in order. Go on over to Launching Point for help. You won't open your heart without getting this basic practice right - you have to give generously to God first. So start a regular, consistent, generous giving plan.

We are to be generous with our money and it must include that. But that is not the only way we are to be open. We also need to learn to be generous with our time, attention, effort, possessions and more. We can be generous with our words - that's called being encouraging. And some of us don't have a lot of money to give, even if we give 10%. But we all have the same amount of time and maybe we consider tithing our time and effort in serving others. That's part of an open heart. I'm going to talk about this a lot more next week.

So let me summarize what will help open our lives to be generous. First, embrace gratitude. Let gratitude fill your heart. Second, give generously and regularly to the Lord. And finally, open up your heart to give of your time, effort and energy in service. Intentionally grow your generosity. Why? **The open life opens us to the best life.**

We are going to close singing a song called Have It All. This is an opportunity to declare that we'll surrender our fear and greed and trust God to open our hearts. I love the words of the bridge in this song:

There is no greater call  
Than giving You my all

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I lay it all down  
I lay it all down

Would you stand and sing. **Song:** *Have It All*