



Bethel South Sermon Notes – “Give Yourself First”

Speaker: Ps Mike Gowans

Series: Open Hands

Scripture: Hebrews 11:6, 2 Corinthians 8:1–5, Genesis 8:22, Galatians 6:7–9, 2 Corinthians 9:6–11, Matthew 6:21

Main Idea

Generosity begins with trust. We cannot fully open our hands to God until we trust the One we are surrendering to. When we understand God's character, give ourselves completely to Him, and recognize the eternal impact of our generosity, we can move from holding tightly to our resources to living with open hands. God isn't simply asking for what we have—He wants our hearts.

Open Hands Begin with Trust

Imagine holding something precious tightly in your fist.

Someone approaches and asks you to open your hand and give it to them.

What determines whether you're willing to release it?

Trust.

If you know the person, believe in their character, and trust that they have your best interests at heart, surrender becomes easier.

The same principle applies to our relationship with God.

We often trust God with our eternity, forgiveness, and salvation, yet struggle to trust Him with our finances.

Why?

Because money represents more than purchasing power. It represents:

- Security and stability.
- Comfort and convenience.
- Freedom and independence.
- Control over our circumstances.

Sometimes the hardest thing to surrender isn't the money itself, but the control we believe it gives us.

Jesus consistently addressed money and possessions because they reveal the condition of our hearts.

Matthew 6:21 says:

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Our willingness to surrender what we value reveals the depth of our trust.

You will never fully open your hands until you trust the God you're opening them to.

Four Principles of Trust, Surrender, and Generosity

1. Know the God You're Trusting

[Hebrews 11:6]

Faith begins with knowing who God is.

Hebrews 11:6 teaches that without faith it is impossible to please God. We must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.

Trust isn't built on wishful thinking.

It is built on knowing God's character.

God is our:

- **Provider** — He knows our needs and faithfully cares for us.
- **Father** — He loves us and desires what is best for us.
- **Creator** — Everything ultimately belongs to Him.

We must recognize that we are not the ultimate owners of what we possess.

We are stewards of what God has entrusted to us.

Everything good comes from Him, and everything we have is an opportunity to honor Him.

The greatest evidence of God's goodness is the cross.

God did not withhold His own Son from us. He gave His very best for our redemption.

If we can trust Him with our eternity, we can learn to trust Him with our everyday needs.

The more we know God's character, the easier it becomes to surrender what we hold.

2. Give Yourself First to the Lord

[2 Corinthians 8:1–5]

Paul describes the extraordinary generosity of the Macedonian churches.

These believers were experiencing severe trials and extreme poverty.

Yet even in difficult circumstances, they demonstrated remarkable generosity.

Their giving wasn't the result of having an abundance of resources.

It came from an abundance of surrender.

2 Corinthians 8:5 reveals the secret:

“They gave themselves first of all to the Lord.”

Before they gave their resources, they gave their hearts.

This establishes an important principle:

Acceptable giving begins with personal surrender.

God isn't simply interested in a financial transaction.

He desires a life fully devoted to Him.

When we give ourselves to Jesus, everything else begins to follow:

- Our time becomes His.
- Our talents become His.
- Our resources become His.
- Our priorities begin to reflect His Kingdom.

Generosity doesn't begin when we finally have more money.

It begins when we surrender our hearts to God with whatever we have today.

The question isn't how much money you have. It's how much of your heart belongs to God.

3. Understand the Principle of Sowing and Reaping

[Genesis 8:22; Galatians 6:7–9; 2 Corinthians 9:6–11]

Throughout Scripture, God establishes the principle of seedtime and harvest.

Genesis 8:22 describes the continuing rhythm of planting and harvesting.

Paul builds on this principle in Galatians 6, reminding believers that we reap what we sow.

There are three important truths about sowing and reaping.

We reap what we sow.

The kind of seed we plant determines the kind of harvest we can expect.

If we sow friendliness, we cultivate friendships.

If we sow kindness, we create opportunities for kindness to grow.

If we sow generously, we participate in God's work of generosity.

We reap after we sow.

Harvest doesn't happen immediately.

There is always a season between planting and reaping.

We cannot expect to experience the fruit of seeds we have never planted.

Faithfulness requires patience, consistency, and trust in God's timing.

We often reap more than we sow.

A single seed has the potential to produce a harvest far greater than itself.

In 2 Corinthians 9, Paul explains that those who sow generously will also reap generously.

God is able to multiply what we entrust to Him and produce a harvest beyond what we could accomplish on our own.

But the purpose of this multiplication is important.

God supplies seed to the sower so that generosity can continue.

His provision isn't intended to make us increasingly self-focused.

It enables us to become generous on every occasion.

Galatians 6:9 encourages us not to become weary in doing good because, at the proper time, we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

Even when we cannot immediately see results, we can trust that God is at work.

4. Sow Seeds That Produce an Eternal Harvest

[2 Corinthians 9:10–11]

Generosity has an impact far beyond what we can immediately see.

When we sow into God's Kingdom, we participate in something eternal.

This was demonstrated through the recent outreach in Nogales, Mexico.

Through ministry in schools, government departments, and a city-wide crusade, the gospel reached people throughout the community.

More than a hundred children and hundreds of adults responded to the message of Jesus.

But beyond the numbers, there were individual lives being transformed.

One young man had climbed onto a high overpass that evening, intending to end his life.

While there, he noticed the outreach taking place nearby.

He heard the message that his heavenly Father saw him and cared for him.

Instead of following through with his plan, he responded to the gospel and surrendered his life to Jesus.

That night, his story changed.

This testimony reminds us that God sees the individual.

Behind every outreach, every ministry opportunity, and every act of generosity are real people whose lives can be impacted for eternity.

The resources we sow into God's Kingdom can help make it possible for others to hear the gospel, encounter God's love, and experience salvation.

We may never personally meet everyone impacted by our giving.

But the eternal fruit of generosity extends beyond what we can see.

What we sow in faith today can make an eternal difference in someone else's tomorrow.

The Heart Behind Generosity

Throughout this series, the invitation has been to move from closed fists to open hands.

Closed hands represent fear, control, and self-reliance.

Open hands represent trust, surrender, and generosity.

God doesn't ask us to surrender because He needs what we possess.

He invites us to surrender because He desires our hearts.

As we grow in our knowledge of His character, we learn that He can be trusted with everything.

When we give ourselves first to Him, generosity becomes a natural expression of our devotion.

And when we understand the eternal impact of what we sow, we begin to see our resources as opportunities to participate in His Kingdom.

Generosity isn't simply about releasing what is in our hands. It's about trusting the One whose hands hold our lives.

Final Challenge

What are you still holding onto?

Is there an area of your life where you trust God in theory but struggle to surrender in practice?

Maybe it's your finances, your future, your comfort, or your desire to remain in control.

God is inviting you to open your hands.

Remember who He is.

He is your Father, your Provider, and the One who gave His very best for you.

Give yourself first to the Lord, and allow your generosity to flow from a heart that belongs completely to Him.

Don't grow weary in doing good. Continue sowing faithfully, knowing that God can use your obedience to produce fruit that lasts for eternity.

And if you have been running from God or withholding your heart from Him, today is an opportunity to surrender your entire life to Jesus.

Open your hands. Trust His heart. Surrender your life. And allow God to use what you've been given for His eternal purposes.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you think it's sometimes easier to trust God with our salvation and eternity than with our finances, security, or everyday circumstances?
2. The sermon teaches that we will never fully open our hands until we trust the God we're opening them to. What aspects of God's character help you trust Him, and where do you still struggle to believe He has your best interests at heart?
3. In 2 Corinthians 8, the Macedonian believers gave themselves first to the Lord before giving their resources. What is the difference between giving God something we have and surrendering our entire lives to Him?
4. How does the principle of sowing and reaping challenge the way you approach generosity, especially when you don't see immediate results from your faithfulness?
5. After hearing the testimony from the Nogales outreach, how does recognizing the eternal impact of generosity change the way you view your time, talents, and finances? What is one area where God may be inviting you to open your hands more fully?