

Give It All Away

Generosity

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: Assorted

Speaker: Joel Greenwood

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Well, today is a special day for us here at Fairview Missionary Church. Today, every year, one Sunday, we call give it all away Sunday. And so today, as a church family, out of obedience to Scripture, we are going to practice this idea of generosity and exercise our giving muscles. Practice giving so that we can become even better at being generous. Now, if you're new here today or you're visiting, I'm glad that you are here and certainly welcome you to join us.

But do not feel that you need to be included in this Give It All Away Sunday. If this is your first time with us, maybe as you come more, you will feel more a part of that to join us and give it all away. But you can just be here. So as an act of worship and gratitude to who God is, today at Fairview, we are going to give away 100% of today's offering.

If you weren't here last week and you didn't get to hear who we give this to, you can go back online and watch that video and you can hear some of the organizations and ministries and individuals that we give this money to. We choose those organizations and individuals based on their kingdom impact. Our desire with this offering and with all of the money that we give away throughout the year is to impact ministries that are advancing the kingdom of God.

And so if you want to know who those are, again, it's not secret, who we share that with. If you walk in the church, there's a small sitting room just on the right-hand side. If you go in there, there's a wall that has brochures and pamphlets. And one of those will share all of the ministries and missionaries that we support, as well as all of our finances at the church, because we don't want any of this to be secretive or to somehow be weird. Jesus warned us that when we give, when we give to the needy, when we share with others, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.

This is true for individuals, it's true for families, and it's true for organizations. If this becomes an issue where our giving is done almost as a way of boasting or bragging, then the praise you receive from man will be the only reward you get. And we are not doing this to receive praise from men. We are doing this to honor God and to follow the example of what He has done for us. One of our core statements here at Fairview is that you are never more like Jesus than when you give.

Jesus gave sacrificially of His life, of His time, and of His resources. And so today, as we talk about giving, the goal is that you and I would be more like Jesus. And so as we give, it is done as an act of worship, and it cannot and should not be about us. One of the funny things that I've realized as I've been in this position now for a longer period, as I meet individuals that come and meet with me for various reasons, I have never run into someone who doesn't think he or she is generous.

Everybody I talk to says they are generous. Every person I talk with will use this phrase. I would give you the shirt off my back if you needed it. Have you heard that before? Now, I've never taken anybody up on that offer to see if they actually would give me the shirt off their back. But if everyone were really that generous, if we were all as generous as we think we are, I don't think we would have nearly the amount of needy people that we do in our world.

I think our human instincts cause us to err in how we view our own generosity. I think all of us would believe we are actually more generous than what we actually are. Generosity is defined as the practice of freely giving of your time, your resources, and even of your kindness to others without expecting anything in return. It's giving of not just your money, but giving of your time, giving of your energy, giving of the things that you have been blessed with without expecting anything in return. That's really the key point. I think we live in a culture, and I certainly was raised by parents that taught me to give and taught me to love others well, taught me to be a hard worker. And sometimes I think I can error in the way that many of us err, that when somebody gives me something, I feel the obligation to give them something in return.

Have you ever shown up at a family Christmas event or whatever, and somebody was there that maybe you didn't know was going to be there and they gave you a gift during Christmas and you didn't have something to give them in return? Have you ever had that experience? It feels awful, doesn't it? Don't we live in a world where there's this idea of, hey, you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours. But yet, with this idea of generosity, we should be giving, not expecting anything in return. And it also should teach us, as individuals, when somebody gives something to us, we should not feel obligated to give in return.

And sometimes that's the harder thing to learn, isn't it? To just receive that blessing. Because you know, if you feel obligated to give something in return, I know this is going to sound harsh. And sometimes I've had people say this to me when they give me something and I say, "Oh, I don't need that. Give it to somebody else or whatever." And they'll say, "You know, you're stealing my blessing." That's tough to hear, isn't it? Like, "Oh, okay, fine, I'll take it." We need to learn to receive just as much as we learn to give. That's part of this whole process.

Paul said to Timothy and to us, "Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant, nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but instead to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment, command them to do good, and to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share." I know I say this every year, but Scripture does not say that money in and of itself is evil. It is the love of money that is evil. It is putting our hope in money that can steer us away from God. And so Paul is saying, "Listen, for those that are rich, learn to be generous. Learn to be good at being rich." There's nothing wrong or inherently sinful with having wealth or having money, but learn to be good with it. Learn to put your hope in God, not in your wealth. The wealthy in this country and abroad should be generous, not just with their finances, but with their time and their talents and their resources.

And I know I say this every year. Some of you have already written me off because you say, "Pastor, you use this term rich." Well, I'm not rich. So Paul was talking to somebody else. Paul's not talking to me because I don't know many people that actually feel rich. But I look this up every year so that I can share this with you because it is shocking to me as well. If your family, now I'm not talking individually, all of the incomes that are coming into your house, if your family income is just the average American income of a normal family, \$65,000 a year, which is now what that average is in America.

Again, that's multiple incomes. Could be one income. That's pre-tax. If your family brings in \$65,000 a year, did you know that you are in the top 1% of the world in money earners? The top 1%, that is crazy. You say, "Well, Pastor, that's fine. I'm not at 65. I'm at 40." You'd still be in the top 5%. Meaning that you make more than 99% of the rest of the world. And statistically, no matter how you feel or how I feel, this makes you rich, whether you feel like it or not.

Now we live in a society where most of us would say, "Well, that's crazy. I don't feel rich." And part of the reason for that is because we live in a world where we have people that have been so good at marketing that when you see things that are for sale on TV and advertisements, they don't even tell you often what that product costs. They just tell you how much you have to pay per month, right? Monthly payments, all the money coming in has now gone out. And of course you don't feel rich. If every cent of your paycheck is spent before it even comes in and you're living paycheck to paycheck.

But according to statistics, you and I would be rich. So Paul is speaking to us. So the question as a church, as individuals, as a family, then, is to say, are we good at being rich? Are we doing a good job of it? Are we being rich in our good deeds? Are we being generous and willing to share not just of our finances, again, but also to

share of our time. Do you know how amazing it is that we live in a culture and in a period of history where you and I have extra time that we can call leisure time?

Because all of our needs are met. We have food to eat, we have shelter, we have all of these things that often would take up every moment of somebody's waking hours. Now we have all of those things provided. And so we have leisure time. And so it's being generous also with our time. And so the goal every year of doing this series is that you and I, as a church, as individuals, as families, could answer yes to all of those questions. Are we doing a good job of being rich? Yes, I hope we are.

And so I want to spend some time talking about that idea this morning of what that looks like and what that means. Again, if you're new today, I just feel I have to share with you. We don't talk about money all throughout the year, but this one time I give myself the freedom to talk about money. And it is just as awkward for me as it is for you, okay? I have been put in this position, and so I feel that as the shepherd of this flock, as the pastor of this group of people, again, almost looking at it like a family, that I want to teach you what God is teaching us through His Word.

And if I avoid completely this topic of finances, I am avoiding a lot of what God has spoken to us. And again, I remind you from last week, God doesn't need our money. It's not about the money. It's about our hearts. And that's why this can be so awkward to talk about. It can be difficult to do. But my goal is to draw us closer to God by allowing us to give as an act of worship. And that's why we do this give it all away offering, is because when I talk about money, I want you to know it's not about the church.

It's not about me personally. It's not even about us that it's about your heart and your relationship with God. And that's why we're talking about this. So please don't be offended. Please know that it's just as awkward for me as it is for you. And so we're kind of doing this together so that we can be in the right place where God wants us. So let me pray. And then I want to share with you three observations I have seen about giving over the last 15-plus years that we have done this. So let me pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank You that we can gather today and we can discuss what for many is a difficult topic of finances. Lord, may we be reminded that it's not really about the money, it's about our hearts. Father, it's about an act of worship and giving back to you what you have given to us as a way to say thank you, as a way to be obedient.

Lord, we truly are a blessed people. And as much as we may struggle in this area of finances compared to the rest of the world, we truly, truly have more than we need. And so may we be generous as we follow the example that you have laid for us. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

The first thing that I've learned about giving over the last 15 years is that giving is personal. It's personal. My goal today and I know I shared this with you last week, but my goal today is not to make you feel bad. It's not to make you feel guilty or to somehow shame you into giving. What you do with your finances is between you and God. It is deeply personal. You need to know that as I stand up here, I fully recognize and believe that you don't owe me anything.

You owe me nothing in all of this. This is between you and God. My goal today is simply to help you grow in your relationship with Jesus by encouraging you to give to Him your money and your resources. Scripture is very clear that there is nearly zero benefit for you if you give out of shame or guilt or pressure. And so again, I will say it today on the day we collect this offering.

If you are going to give out of shame or guilt or pressure, I would rather you not give until you can give for a better reason that the Apostle Paul talks about in 2 Corinthians chapter 9. You see, when the Apostle Paul was traveling around the world and starting and planting churches during his missionary journeys, he would collect an offering because these individuals wanted to give. And when he collected that offering, he would bring it back to Jerusalem with him and he would give it to those who were needy and those that were less fortunate and needed some of their physical needs to be met.

And so as he was talking to churches about this, he makes this statement in 2 Corinthians 9:7. He says, "Listen, each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or out of compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." So again, I say, if you cannot give cheerfully, don't give. If you have questions that you want to ask of me or of the church leadership before you give, you can do that.

Please send me an email, send me a text message, give me a phone call, and we will do our best to answer those questions as best as we can. We are not doing anything secretive with this. There is not some ulterior motive. That's why we have everybody we support publicly available. We have our church finances publicly available. But if there are more questions, we would love to answer those questions. This is between you and God. Remember, he is concerned about your heart.

One of the things that we do as humans, when we invite Jesus into our hearts and into our lives, and we proclaim Him as our Lord and Savior, I think every single one of us has that one junk drawer or closet of our life that we say, "God, come on in, but don't open that door. It's really messy." We close off a section and we say, "God, just don't go in there. I haven't fixed all that up yet." And so please stay away from that area.

Our goal as followers of Jesus is to open up our entire hearts and lives to Him, including our messy areas because He can be trusted. And often, our financial room of our house is one of the last rooms that we open up because it is personal, because there's some kind of weird feeling around that. But when we open up that room to God and say, "We give you everything," it truly becomes a win-win. It becomes a win for us because our hearts and our character is challenged and it is changed.

But it's also a win to those that we give to. Think about these organizations and ministries that we are giving to, how encouraging it is for them to receive these funds. One of the things that I don't often share with you is that as we give of these funds and we send them the check or however we do that, we will get almost from everybody we do this for. We'll get a letter back from them thanking us for this and I share those with the leadership team. But one of the things that is almost always on those letters that amazes me is they will of course say thank you. You were an answer to prayer. Have you ever thought about the idea that you could be the answer to somebody else's prayer? That they have a need that they've not even shared with anybody. It was a private need that they have cried out to God. And then God taps our hearts and says, "Hey, I want you to be a part of that." What a privilege that is. We can only give because of what God has given us. And it actually ends up being a win-win-win because not only does it affect our hearts, not only does it encourage those individuals and ministries that we give to, but it also then allows them to continue to minister to the very people that we want to minister to. They continue to get their needs met, and those that we are called to take care of, we still have the opportunity to take care of them. And that's why this is so exciting. It's an opportunity for all of us to be a part of something that is much bigger than ourselves. You may never be able to write a \$10,000 check to an organization. You may never be able to give that amount, but when we collectively do that, we can do that multiple times over and bless these organizations.

I love when people are excited to hear the final amount we gave because they were part of it and they see that larger number and they say, "Man, I would never be able to do that alone." But look what happens when we come together as a family and we just do what God has called us to do. Giving is personal. I've also learned over the years that giving is contagious. Giving is contagious because giving is countercultural. It causes people to ask questions.

Have you ever given a random gift to somebody, whether it was a family member or a neighbor or whatever else, of significant value. I'm not talking about bringing over cookies or whatever else. I mean, that's awesome. We seem to receive that well. But when you give of a significant unexpected gift to somebody and you hand it to them and they just kind of stand there like, "What do I do now?" Because it's so countercultural. We're not even used to it. We don't even know how to respond. It causes our brain to short circuit for a little bit because the world is all about me, me, me.

It's all about selfishness. It's about how I can fulfill my desires and buy things for myself and take care of myself. But yet when we look at Scripture, Jesus over and over again ministered to those individuals that were on the fringe of society. Those that the world said were unlovable. They weren't equal to everybody else. There was something that was wrong with them. And yet, Jesus' generosity toward them really transformed the hearts and minds, not just of those He was ministering to, but also of those that He was ministering with.

Let me just give you one quick example. Mark chapter 1:40, "There was a man with leprosy who came to Jesus and begged him on his knees. You need to know if you had leprosy back in this culture, you were certainly an outcast. You were considered unclean. You were not allowed to touch anybody else or even be close to anybody

else for fear that your disease would spread to them. And so here is somebody that is totally on the fringes of society. And he comes before Jesus on his knees, begging, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." And Jesus was indignant.

He reached out his hand and he touched the man. "I am willing," he said, "be clean." And immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed. Over and over again in the Gospels, we read stories of Jesus loving those that the world said were unlovable. And the disciples and the early church followed that example, and it caused them to stand out in their world in such a way that thousands would join them because they noticed something different.

They were different. It truly was this no strings attached generosity that fueled the growth of the early church. People looked at this church and said, "Man, they're different. They're giving. They're loving. They're generous. They treat all human beings with respect and love and honor. And so now it's our turn to pick up that mantle, to be generous, to take care of others by following the example of Jesus and then following the example of that early church.

Our prayer is that as we do this offering, that the kingdom of God would be advanced through these gifts. And we'll pray for that in closing. The next thing I learned about giving over the last few years, of course, is that giving is beautiful. When we give, we speak love to others. It's almost a new language. When you give, somebody understands or you care about me, you're willing to sacrifice for me. You know about my needs and you want to take care of those needs.

When we give, we get a voice with others. Do you know how much more willing somebody is to hear your story after you have heard their story and then given to them? Given of time, energy, resources, finances actually reached out to them. It opens up a door that almost nothing else can open so that they're willing to say, "Let me know about your story. Why are you willing to help me? You maybe don't even know who I am. Why are you willing to help?" And we can share that we help because of what Jesus has done for us.

It's not because of anything we are. And when we give, hearts change. Not only the hearts of those we give to, but probably even more so, our hearts change. We begin to recognize what Jesus said in Acts 20:35, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." When you and I give, God does something in our hearts. The tight grip that we have on the things of this world, we begin to let go and to open up a little more.

We begin to put our hope in Him instead of physical things that are eventually going to fade. That is the goal that our hope would be in Him. One of the privileges of this job that I've had over the last 22 years is the many times that I have been asked to help an elderly couple as they're getting ready to either move into a nursing home or whatever else. And so they have their house of all of their belongings. And in almost every situation, the family has already come in and they've said, hey, grab or take whatever you want. I know I can't take any of this stuff with me, so you go ahead and just take whatever you want.

So the family comes in and then friends have come in and neighbors have come in and then they call the church and they let us come in and they're like, "Anything you want, you can just take what you want." And you know what's amazing when we get there? Nobody usually wants anything. All of these things that we value and accumulate and build up our entire lives, you can't even give away when you don't want them anymore. They're outdated, they're whatever. They're just nothing. And it's realizing that, that how much more of a privilege and an honor is it for us to give than it is to just hoard things that eventually nobody's going to want.

Now, if they had money sitting on the counter, I'm sure that still wouldn't be there when we got there, right? Take whatever you want. People would grab that. What does it mean to give and to be generous? We're not going to do anything special today. We're not going to pass the offering plate. We're going to collect it how we do every Sunday. There's boxes out in the foyer where you can drop your money off too. That's one of the results of COVID. You guys remember when we used to pass the offering? That's one of my favorite things that COVID brought. We don't do that anymore, right? We don't have to worry about that. You don't have to worry about how it looks when visitors come and you're passing an offering plate.

I love that we don't have to do that anymore. There's those see-through black bins out there in the foyer you can drop. If you've ever been hesitant to give to the church because it just rubs you the wrong way, this is your time to give because you're not giving to us. It's just going through the church. It's just passing through our hands. I

pray that this settles your heart concerning fair view. The leadership team is not asking you to do something that we are not willing to do ourselves. And I say it all the time. We don't want to be normal because normal isn't good at being generous.

So I encourage you to join with us. Volunteer offering counters that come in and count the offering. Another thing that's been done at the church ever since I have been here is that I have zero to do with how much money comes in and I don't see any of those numbers on an individual level. And I think it's important for me to tell you that. I don't know what any of you give. So if you are giving today or ever to try to impress me, it didn't work. I don't know what anybody gives. And I love that we do that as a church. And here's why.

Humanly speaking, I would love to be able to say, "Yeah, whoever gives whatever, I would treat everybody the same." But I just think humanly speaking, there would be the potential, if nothing else, for that small part of me to know, oh, man, they give a lot of money. I want to make sure that I listen to them and I hear their phone calls and whatever else. And I don't want to do that. I don't want to show favoritism. So one way to do that is, I don't have any idea what you give. And so this truly is between you and God. Of course, the offering counters know, but I'm not going to tell you who they are. So you can't ask that.

This is not about us. It's not about the church. It's not about impressing anybody. It truly is between you and God. Let me pray. Heavenly Father, thank you that we have the privilege of giving. And for many, if not all of us, the giving is going to be out of our surplus. It's hard to even call it sacrificial giving when all of our needs are still provided for.

We're truly just giving of the extra things that we could get or receive. But Father, we pray that you would receive these offerings from willing hearts, cheerful hearts that we are giving because of what you have given us. And that as we give, we would remember and recognize that it is not about us as individuals. It's not about us as a church.

Father, we desire that you would receive the praise, that you would receive the glory. When there is excitement, when people receive these gifts, that all of the praise and glory would go to you because of who you are. Continue to work on our hearts. Continue to draw us closer to you. And so it's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.