

**Shine ... Generosity**  
***It's Not What You Think***  
**May 8, 2016**

**PRELUDE – Come Thou Fount**  
**Worship Songs – Who Is Like Our God / One**  
**Thing Remains**

**Feature – The House That Built Me**  
**Mother's Day Recognition – Rick**

Good morning everyone.

All of us have a house and a home and a family that built us. For most of us, it was a really good experience – a dad and a mom who loved us and cared for us the best that they could. For others of us, it left something to be desired.

But today is a special day because we get to honor some special people who have either built or are in the process of building the next generation. So, if you're somebody's mom, I want you to stand right now so that we can honor you.

<stand>

We appreciate all of you. We couldn't have done it without you – literally. And I want to pray for you.

Pray for young moms, middle moms, grandmas.

- Vision for their role in your kingdom – legacy
- Endurance for the hard times
- Joy in the task

Amen.

Thanks, you can be seated.

## **Announcements – Video**

### **Feature - Learning to Be the Light**

Learning to be the light ... that song is a great way for us to kick off this brand new series – actually, we're kicking off a *series* of series that

are designed to help us learn be the light that Jesus has called and empowered His followers to be.

*“You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house.*

*In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.”* Matthew 5:14-16 (NLT)

And *the reason* we’re doing this series of series – which is going to run through pretty much the whole summer – the reason we’re going to spend so much time talking about what it means for individual Christians and little communities of Christians (like NHCC) to “shine out” (as Jesus put it) is that, right now, in our culture, there is so much angst and dissatisfaction and darkness. People are divided. People are worried. People

are disgusted with fact that “the establishment” and “the system” seem to be unresponsive and, in some cases, even corrupt.

And, right now, the loudest voices saying “I have the answer to all of those problems” are those of Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump.

But they don't. Not that there aren't some good ideas spread among the three of them, but human nature and the nature of power (once systems and establishments have been built) means that very little of the overall structure in which we live is likely to change for the better. Big government and big corporations are most likely going to keep doing what they've always done – which is to expand their power at the expense of individual liberty.

And if you're a Christian – a follower of Jesus – you can be depressed by that ... or ... you can remember that's how it was in His day ... *and* ...

that He started a movement which turned the world upside down with no earthly power whatsoever – political, economic or military; and that movement continues to accomplish the same kind of transformation in people and cultures even today.

## **Up There Down Here**

We've talked about it pretty much every week since Easter Sunday so I'm sure you remember that right before Jesus returned to Heaven, His disciples wanted to know if He was going to put on his kingly crown and get rid of the establishment and change the system.

“Are you going to overthrow the Romans and restore the Kingdom to Israel?” they wanted to know. And Jesus said no.

“What I'm going to do,” He said, “is I'm going to use you to change the world from the bottom up through the power of the Holy Spirit and the

testimony of how your life has changed. You're going to be the light, individually and collectively. Together, you're going to form a little outpost of Heaven on Earth. As a result, people everywhere will be drawn to God through you. And their lives will begin to change and their families will begin to change and their communities will begin to change, even if the establishment and the system do not."

Jesus said that over 2,000 years ago but His vision for His followers is still the same today.

**His plan (as I said last week) was to create an alternative community of Spirit-empowered people (called "The Church") who would follow in His way; who would devote themselves to praying and living in such a way that "up there" can come "down here."**

Remember, Jesus' primary message was not how to go to Heaven when we die (though that is what happens if we turn to Him and believe in Him as our savior). Jesus' primary message was

that *the Kingdom of Heaven is coming down here*.

“All the preliminaries have been taken care of, and the Kingdom of God is now accessible to everyone,” he said. “It’s at hand. So, revise your plans for living (or, to use the biblical language, *repent*) and base your life on this remarkable opportunity.<sup>i</sup> Believe the good news!” (Mark 1:15)

And His primary prayer – the prayer He taught his disciples – was not “God, get us out of this dark world and take us up there.”

**Instead, it was “May your Kingdom come down here ...**

“... may your will be done down here as it is up there” (or wherever Heaven is). May the way You live become how we live. May the way Heaven operates become the way we operate.”

And this, friends, is the real answer to all the brokenness we see in our world: for “up there” to

come “down here.”

I don’t know about you but, to me, that vision is so much more interesting and inspiring and challenging and motivating and fulfilling than just treading water until we kick the bucket and go “up there.”

The question is ... and this is what we’re going to be talking about in the upcoming series of series ... what does it look like for individual Christians and churches to be conduits of “up there” to “down here”? What light- shining-in-the-darkness winsome attitudes and behaviors really stand out in our current culture?

Last week, I told you that I feel like God has been impressing on me five such characteristics: *generosity, graciousness, goodness, God-centeredness*, and being *Gospel-driven* (which is the motivation to help other people find what we have found in Christ). Maybe we should call those the five “G”s.



And we're going to be talking about all of them over the next several months.

## **Generosity First**

And for the next three Sundays we're going to focus on the first of those "G"s ... *generosity*.

And I'm sure you're wondering why I put this one first. There are three reasons.

**First, generosity was probably the greatest outwardly visible characteristic of the original followers of Jesus.**

Acts 4 tells us that people who were part of the very first church ...

*... felt that what they owned was not their own, so they shared everything they had. There were no needy people among them, because those who owned land or houses would sell them and bring the money to the apostles to give to those in need.*

Acts 4:32,34-35 (NLT)

And people took notice of this characteristic ... so much so that *three hundred years later*, after Christianity had spread all over the Roman Empire, Emperor Julian (who was no friend of Christianity) complained that since Christians were in the habit of supporting both their own poor and those outside the church, “those who belong to us (speaking of Roman citizens) look in vain for the help we should render to them.”<sup>ii</sup>

In other words “our people look at the generosity of Christians and wonder why *we’re* not doing the same kind of thing for *them*.”

Second reason we’re starting with generosity is that while generosity was probably the greatest outwardly visible characteristic of the first followers of Jesus ...

**It’s probably also the greatest shortcoming among Christians today.**

Statistics reveal that most followers of Jesus (at least in this country) are simply not generous with their financial resources. We *think* we are (and I'll explain why that's true in just a bit) but we're really not. And that's why most churches and non-profit ministries rarely meet or exceed their annual budgets and more and more are folding for financial reasons.

Generosity is probably the greatest shortcoming among Christians today.

**Finally, of all the “Gs” we could talk about, the reason we’re starting with generosity is that it’s probably also the hardest topic. It’s the greatest challenge of the five for us to consider...**

... because whenever churches talk about money and possessions everyone, gets real nervous ... including the guy who is doing the talking. A lot of times people get offended and don't come back. And this particular series is going to be even more offensive than usual, so I figured we'd start with it because if you and I can make it

through this one, we might actually stick together long enough to increase our impact for Jesus in this community.

So let's get into it. And let me begin by explaining why this series is going to be even more offensive than the usual series dealing with money and possessions. Even this message title is offensive. "*Generosity ... it's not what you think.*"<sup>iii</sup>

The reason this is going to be offensive is that I want to teach you how to do something in this series that you think you already know how to do. But if no one has ever taught you how to do it, you probably think you know how but you don't. So for next three weeks, *I want to teach you how to be generous; not how to give* – all of us know how to give. We do that all the time. But we aren't generous.

And, as soon as somebody says you don't do something, if you're like most people, you get a little bit offended and immediately think of that

one time you did it. Men, if your wife says you “just don’t help enough around the house” what’s the first thing that comes to mind?

“That time in 2014 that I cleaned out the garage! How can you not remember that time when you came home and I had cleaned out the garage?”

When somebody says you don’t do something, you think of the one thing that’s the exception to the rule. So when I say “in this series I want to teach you how to be generous because I don’t think anyone has ever taught you how to be generous,” immediately you’re going to think, “Are you kidding me? I do generous stuff all the time. Whenever some kid is selling something for their organization, I buy. Whenever my friends do fundraisers, I sign up. Heck, back when you did the Excellence Challenge here at NHCC, I contributed. When you did that 29.99 on the spot offering last fall, I gave to that, too. So, I’m offended that you would say I don’t know how to be generous.”

But when I talk about generosity, I'm not talking about random acts of giving. Most of us are really good at random acts of giving. And random acts of giving generally come as a result of someone ...

- Persuading us to do something.
- Asking us to do something.
- Inspiring us to do something.
- Guilting us to do something.

The truth is that most of our random acts of giving are at the end of a sales pitch. And I don't mean that in a negative way. But generally, somebody makes a need known and we think, "Hmmm, maybe I should do that" and then there's a random act of giving that takes place.

But what we're talking about in this series – generosity – is *not* random acts of giving. Not that there's anything *wrong* with random acts of giving. I'm all for those. In fact, the more, the

better!

But for the next few weeks, I want to talk specifically about *generosity* and *how to be generous* because no one has ever explained it to us ... which is why it's one of the greatest weaknesses of Christians today ... and yet, historically, it's been one of the top characteristics that distinguishes Christians from the rest of the world (because everyone in this world – at least, in this country – does random acts of giving).

Now, I'm going to make you a promise here at the beginning: when you become generous (when you move beyond random acts of giving); when you become a generous person; when you learn how to be generous (and again you have to be taught); when you learn how to order your life around generosity ...

**You will actually *give more*, you will actually *save more* and you will *consume less*.**

Generous people by nature give more money, save more money and consume less.

Now, there *is* a small group of us for whom that is not true. Some of us have already saved so much that we're borderline hoarding our money. And if *you* become generous, you will not save more. You'll just give more and consume less because you've already saved enough. You have more money than everyone on the four rows in front of you and behind you and you are still nervous about money.

And it's not because you don't have enough money. It's because you've never learned to be generous.

I don't mean you never give. You do random acts of giving just like everyone else. In fact you have so many zeros on the end of your check that people think you're generous – in fact, *you* think you're generous – but, if no one has ever *taught* you to be generous, you're probably not in spite



of the zeros!

But for most of us, if you will order your life around generosity ... you will give more, you will save more and you will consume less.

On top of that, here's the promise Jesus makes: *you actually will be happier*. We'll talk more about that a bit later but it's true. You've never met an unhappy generous person.

## **Naturally Crazy**

Now, the reason this has to be taught (even though we all think we're generous because we can all remember those times we did some random acts of giving) is because generosity is not natural.

If you have kids or have ever spent time watching kids you know this. You know that we have to teach our kids to share. Why? Because generosity doesn't come naturally.

In fact, you're an adult and you *still* resist the idea of generosity every once in a while.

I mean, some of you saw the topic of this series and you thought, "I *do* like the idea of me as a follower of Jesus having a vision that's greater than just treading water until I die. And I *do* like when Rick says NHCC isn't in the 'religious services provider' business; that we are going to get serious about being light in our community ... but I'm not sure I want to hear about *generosity*. Maybe I'll just sit this part out and come back when Rick starts talking about one of the other Gs."

Even as adults, there is still something in us that resists the idea of giving away something that's ours, something that we've worked for. There's still resistance because *generosity is not natural*.

**If you want to know what's *natural* when it comes to money ... what's natural is "*crazy*."**

Crazy is natural when it comes to money, especially in our country.

This is amazing to me. Early in my adulthood I was taught by some very wise people in my church not to do this, so I don't quite understand it. But most Americans spend more money than they make. Just think about that for a second. Spend more than you make. *That* is crazy.

Not only that, most Americans pay interest. Again, I was taught early on to avoid this but most Americans pay interest on things that *decrease in value the moment they take possession of them*. And because of that, the net effect, the reality is that the price immediately increases.

So, what we commit to pay for something increases at the same moment its value decreases. And we live in a culture in which this kind of a transaction is so typical that we think it's normal and sane. But it's not. It's crazy.

And I'll have more to say about this next week.  
But here's something that's just as crazy.

**We don't feel rich, but we are. But we feel generous and we aren't.**

If somebody from a third world country could drop into your life and mine, they would look at us and say, "Are you kidding me? You're rich!" And you would try to explain the financial pressure you feel. And they would listen to you and think you're crazy.

We don't feel rich, but we are. But we think we're generous and, as we're about to discover, we really aren't.

## **Four Myths**

So, having said all that and having gotten everyone a little riled up – I told you this would be the most challenging of the Gs – what exactly do I mean when I use the word *generosity*? If

generosity isn't just random acts of giving; if generosity isn't just that moment when I take something that belongs to me and give it to somebody else, what do I mean by it?

Well, let me try to answer that by giving you four myths about generosity, then a definition that I think really nails it, then we're going to look at something Jesus said and then we'll be done.

**Myth #1. (We've kind of already covered this)  
"Generosity is spontaneous."**

You go somewhere and they're raising money for something ... or you hear about a Go Fund Me project ... or someone down the street is having a tough time and all the neighbors go in and collect some money ... and you say, "OK, here's some money."

That's spontaneous giving. But that's not what we're talking about because generous people are actually less spontaneous and less emotional in their giving. The truly generous person is not

moved near as much by a big inspirational pitch about a need somewhere nor are they ever moved by guilt. Generous people have moved beyond that. Instead, they are *strategic* instead of *spontaneous*.

**Myth #2. “Generosity is determined by cash flow.”**

In other words, “I can be generous today because I just got paid. But I can’t be generous tomorrow because it’s the end of the month or I just went shopping.” It’s determined by cash flow.

But generous people are consistently generous. Their generosity is not determined by what’s going on in the day-to-day flow of income and expenses.

If you’re one of those people who says, “I give when I can afford it, I don’t give when I can’t afford it” then, chances are, you’re a giver but you’ve not learned to be generous.

### **Myth #3. “It’s the amount that counts.”**

I’m sure you’ve heard someone say, “Oh that was such a generous gift” because the number of zeros on the end of the amount is pretty impressive.

Truth is, no one knows if it really was generous except for the person who gave it (and maybe their accountant) because zeros do not necessarily determine whether or not a gift is truly generous. It may be a lot of money compared to what I make or you make but, compared to that person’s overall financial situation, it might actually be stingy. It’s not the amount that counts in generosity...

... which is actually good news because it means that everyone regardless of their financial situation can be generous – and the reason why that is true will become clearer as we get further into this.

Ok, here's the last myth.

**Myth #4. "Rich people are generous."**

I've heard it over and over throughout the years and I'm sure you have too. "When I become rich, then I'll become generous. When I get a really good job ... when I win the lottery ... when I come into a big inheritance ..."

So, let me try to clear this up. It's not hard to understand.

"Rich people are rich. Generous people are generous."

In fact, let's just say that together out loud.

"Rich people are rich. Generous people are generous."

And there is no natural correlation.



And let me just predict something. And this is especially important for anyone in their 20s and 30s. If you are not generous now, when and if you become rich, you'll just be a rich person who is not generous. There is no correlation between how much money you have and how generous you are. They are two completely different characteristics.

## **Generosity Defined**

Ok, so those are four things most people tend to believe about generosity that are simply not true. Now, let's take a look at the definition of generosity that we're going to be using throughout this series.

And I wish I could say that I was smart enough to have thought of this definition myself but I'm not. What I'm going to give you as a definition is actually from Andy Stanley, who is hands down the greatest preacher I have ever heard speak to this issue. Over the years, I've listened to a lot of

his sermons and they're very good but when it comes to generosity he just takes it to another level. He's in another class compared to the rest of us pastors.

So, here's his definition. And we're not really going to talk about it in detail this morning. We'll do that over the next couple of weeks. We'll come back to it and take it apart to get a better level of understanding. But here it is.

**Generosity is the premeditated, calculated, designated emancipation of personal financial assets.**

- Premeditated ... Generous people have thought about this and they have a plan.
- Calculated ... Generous people already know how much they're going to give.
- Designated ... Generous people have already decided in advance where it's going to go. That's why they're not swayed by emotion

or guilt.

- And generous people understand that in order not to be possessed by their possessions and money, they have to set those things free. That's what emancipation means. They set their financial assets free and they are free.

And that's what I really want for you: *freedom*.

When you free your money, you free yourself from your money.

When you begin to view your life through the lens of generosity; when you become a generous person; when you order your financial life around freeing your money ... *it frees you from your money and you will actually be free ... and happier.*

Finally, this definition is not about being generous with your time or generous with your

service ... which are all good things. This is specifically about being generous with your money: the premeditated, calculated, designated emancipation of personal financial assets.

And what's great about this definition is that it transcends the act of giving which, as I said earlier, we're all good at. We already know how to do that. But this is the definition of a generous life.

## **What Jesus Said**

Now, in the time I have left, I want us to look at just one thing Jesus said which is probably the most popular and well-known verse in the Bible about giving. And I'm quite certain that everyone here has heard it at some point – and maybe not even in church – that's how popular and well-known it is. And most of us have probably even said it at some point.

But because it's become one of those things we

just kind of say in this culture without even thinking, I have a hunch that most of us don't really understand what it means.

Now, this statement doesn't actually show up in the four writings about Jesus' life (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). It's actually recorded in the Book of Acts (which we've been reading from quite a bit recently) which tells the story of what happened as Christianity began to spread.

Near the end of the book, Luke tells us about a time when Paul was leaving one of the regions where he had taught the good news of Jesus and the Kingdom of God and many little communities of Jesus-followers (churches) had sprung up. And he records for us Paul's final instructions to the leaders of these churches.

At one point, Paul talks to them about the things he has done for them *including* how he has lived a generous life among them. And not as a way of bragging but to encourage them to follow in his

footsteps.

And then he throws out this statement that is so familiar to those followers of Jesus that when Paul says it they're like, "Oh yeah, we've heard that before." But they understood what Jesus meant when he said it whereas for us, not so much.

**So, after talking about his life of generosity, here's what Paul says ...**

*"You should remember the words of the Lord Jesus: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"* Acts  
20:35 (NLT)

It is more blessed to give than to receive. That's the statement.

And I'm going to guess that whenever you've said this, it was after you gave something in a moment of time and you felt good about it. Somebody said, "Thanks for giving that" and you

said, “Oh, I really like giving because, after all, it’s more blessed to give than to receive.”

**But this saying of Jesus – and this is really important – this saying of Jesus is not about the act of giving something at a moment in time. It is about a way of living.**

It’s not about a random act of giving where we felt good about it.

In fact, let’s just be honest about this. There have been times when you’ve given something and someone has said to you, “It’s more blessed to give than to receive” and you thought to yourself, “Yeah, but, it’s pretty blessed to receive as well, isn’t it? I mean, it’s blessed to give ... *and* blessed to receive ... but I’m not always sure it’s *more* blessed to give than to receive.”

And we feel that way because, when we hear these words, we think about a moment-in-time transaction. But that’s not what Jesus had in mind.

What Jesus was talking about in being blessed was the same thing he was talking about in what Christians have called “The Beatitudes” where he said things like ...

- Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth.
- Blessed are the poor in spirit for they will be comforted.
- Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God.

But the word *blessed* really means *happy* ... but not a momentary flash of elation. It’s the kind of underlying happiness and joy that comes from sowing and reaping over a long period of time. It’s the outcome of a lifestyle; of a habitual way of doing things.

That’s what Jesus is talking about here.

He’s saying, “If you live a generous *life*” not “if



you have *moments of giving*” but “if you live a generous life; if you order your financial world around generosity, you will be happy.” Happiness is the outcome of a lifestyle of generosity – the premeditated, calculated, designated emancipation of financial assets.

“In fact,” Jesus was saying, “you will be *happier* if your life is focused on this rather than focused on consuming with occasional random acts of giving thrown in. Blessed ... happy ... is the man or woman or teenager or kid whose *life* is ordered around giving rather than around getting.”

## Conclusion

Now, at this point in the message, I know some of you are thinking, “How many more weeks is this? Two more? I just remembered I have something to do the next two Sundays.”

But here’s the deal. You don’t have to do

anything as a result of what I'm saying today. I'm really not trying to get something from you. I want to teach you to *be* something.

I mean, if I really wanted to *get* something from you, I could launch into a really big sales pitch and put some pictures up on the screen and sell you. But that's the reason some of you don't enjoy giving. You feel like you're being sold over and over again. You have to be inspired and motivated and you have to have tears in your eyes and then you finally write a check.

This is not about that. This is way better than that. You can learn how to be generous and transcend all of that stuff.

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Now, one more thing and then we'll be done.

Imagine you had all the money you wasted over the past 10 years. It was in a checking account and you couldn't spend it on you. You had to give

it away.

Can you imagine what that would feel like? Kid at school needs help. You write a check that meets the need. Church is running behind on the budget. You write a check that closes the gap. And you can keep doing that over and over because all that money you wasted is just sitting there waiting to be given away.

And people would be like, “Oh, are you rich?” And you would say, “No, I’m not rich. I just can’t spend this money on me. An angel sat on my bed one night ...”

It would feel awesome, wouldn’t it? You would experience the joy and happiness of living a generous life.

So, here’s my question: *why not just do that going forth?*

You can. Because I’m going to teach you how.

You've already screwed up the last five or 10 years with whatever dumb things you did with your money and you would love to have that back even if you couldn't spend it on yourself. So don't do that for another five or ten years. You don't have to. You can learn to be generous.

And you'll save more, spend less and have more joy in your life Jesus said. You'll be happier.

And I know this sounds crazy. But Jesus says *not to be generous with your financial assets is actually what's crazy*. Jesus says to live any other way than generosity ... those are the crazy people. Those are the people without a clue. Those are the people that are living in la-la-land.

The person who learns to live a generous life – those aren't the crazy people. Those are the people who live with their eyes wide open. So, you have to choose your crazy.

And that's what we'll talk about next week.

Let's stand together and let me pray for you as we close.

<prayer>

Baptism sign up

Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> Dallas Willard, quoted at <http://www.jesuscentral.com/ji/jesus-parables-teachings/jesus-keymessages/jesus-goodnews.php>

<sup>ii</sup> See <http://www.ukapologetics.net/09/goodforculture.htm#text28>

<sup>iii</sup> The rest of this message is based on Andy Stanley's first message ("You Just Think You Are") in his 2015 series Crazy Like Us.