

GIVE HOPE

GIVE HOPE:
First Baptist Abilene's
Journey of Generosity

Bible Study Lessons
&
Discussion Guides

October 13, 20, 27

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GIVE HOPE: First Baptist Abilene's Journey of Generosity

Lesson One: Defining Generosity in God's Economy

October 13, 2019

If church members in America gave at least 10% to the church, in 2 years the church could eliminate global starvation, educate all children and provide clean water everywhere in the world – in two years.

Stanford University study

Understanding God's Economy

One thing the Bible is clear about is that our hearts follow our money. Matthew 6:21 says exactly that. *“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”* Our money signals where our hearts are. An interesting exercise is to look at our checkbooks or debit receipts. Where do we spend our money? Is it just on stuff and what we consider as necessities? As much as this exercise deals with personal finances, it really shows our spirituality. It begs the question, “What happens if our hearts are set on what God's heart is set on?”

There are two passages in 2 Corinthians which help answer this question. Paul worked with the church at Corinth on his first and second missionary journey. On his second journey he was taking a collection for the impoverished church in Jerusalem. He was requesting money from young churches, most of them with little resources, to help the mother church in Jerusalem. However, the Corinthian church was not giving and it was better off financially than most of the new churches. So, Paul uses the church in Macedonia as an example for the Corinthians. Here's the account of the story found in 2 Corinthians 8:1-9.

*“We want you to know, brothers, about the **grace** of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ²for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, ⁴begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— ⁵and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. ⁶Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of **grace**. ⁷But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of **grace** also.*

⁸ I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. ⁹ For you know the **grace** of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.”

Now let's jump to chapter 9:6-15. Paul amplifies this idea of generous giving.

⁶ The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to make all **grace** abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. ⁹ As it is written, “He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.” ¹⁰ He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹ You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. ¹² For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. ¹³ By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, ¹⁴ while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing **grace** of God upon you. ¹⁵ Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!”

God's economy calls for a generosity that:

1. ...gives out of an abundance of grace.

In the verses from 2 Corinthians 8, Paul uses the word grace four times. They are bolded for you. Paul is very clear that giving is not motivated by guilt, but by grace. True giving flows from grace. Re-read the Stanford quote at the beginning of the lesson. Such statistics can prompt us to give out of guilt or because we feel bad about the circumstance. But when we give because we feel bad, our motivation only lasts a little while. No habit is developed. Note this difference – these Macedonian churches were impoverished churches. They were located in war-torn areas with high taxes and severe persecution. They had nothing. Read verse 2 again. “...for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.” How does this work?

Let's create a formula to see if that helps us grasp this idea.

Macedonian churches + severe trials + extreme poverty
= overflowing joy + rich generosity.

The result of that formula can only be the outcome of grace. This is the picture Paul is painting for the Corinthians. Compared to the Macedonian churches, the church at Corinth was in pretty good shape financially. Yet, they had not learned about grace.

2. ...gives willingly.

In verses 3-4 we hear the Macedonian churches urgently pleading for the privilege of giving. They had already learned the lesson that when we give according to how God has blessed us, His grace is multiplied toward us.

3. ...gives at least according to its ability.

According to chapter 2 Corinthians 8:12, the Macedonians gave beyond their ability. We are reminded of Jesus' story of the widow who gave out of poverty while others gave out of their wealth. God assigns value differently than we do, doesn't He? Paul tells them to give as much as they can. We tend to ask ourselves, "What can I spare to give," rather than what it will take to accomplish Kingdom work?

4. ...gives generously.

Sounds redundant! According to 2 Corinthians 8:2, the giving of the Macedonians overflowed with generosity and in chapter 9:6 we read of the farmer who understood sowing sparingly reaps a small harvest. Paul's point? **Generous giving to God results in greater giving from God.** Now this is not prosperity gospel of health and wealth. The Macedonians debunk that idea. They gave out of poverty and did not get rich financially because of it.

The fact is God provides enough for us. That's what chapter 9:8 says. There is sufficiency in all things, but verse 11 says God often gives more than we need. Why? So we can be generous. **God's blessings to us are not to increase our standard of living, but to increase our standard of giving.** Maybe you've heard this amazing story:

In 1731, John Wesley tried to define what was enough for him to live on so when God entrusted money to him, he could give the rest away. He determined that 28 pounds would be sufficient. (Remember he's British.) That year he made 30 pounds so he gave 2 away. The next year he doubled his income so he gave 32 away. The next year 90, the next year 120 and so on. When his income reached 1400 pounds, he still gave away all but 28. We could translate that today to an income of \$160,000 American dollars per year and Wesley lived on \$20,000. When he died, they found only a few coins in his house because he had given most of his income away. He understood God's economy.

What happens when you and I, who are incredibly wealthy compared to the rest of the world, define enough? What if we decide anything above enough goes away to others. What happens when that begins to take over our thinking? We could ask God for lots of money. The more we can make, the more we can give. Crazy, isn't it? But Biblical!

You are probably aware of the TV series produced in 2013 by husband/wife team Mark Burnett

and Roma Downey called "*The Bible*." *The Bible* was the number one cable series that year. In its first week of home video release, it became the top-selling mini-series of all time. Then NBC partnered with Burnett and Downey to produce the sequel, "A.D.: The Bible Continues." Burnett later produced the feature film, "Son of God."

Mark Burnett is one of the most successful television producers in history, with \$63 million in earnings in 2013 alone. He has won twelve Emmy Awards, five Producers' Guild of America Awards, seven Critics' Choice Awards and six People's Choice Awards for his work on Survivor, Celebrity Apprentice, The Voice, Shark Tank, and other projects. All told, he has produced thousands of hours of television programming which air regularly in over 70 countries worldwide. His wife, Roma Downey, has starred in 25 different television movies and shows, including the long running "*Touched by An Angel*."

Burnett and Downey testify, "We have both been very blessed to have achieved success in our careers. But while working on *The Bible*, we experienced a different kind of success and prosperity. It is the success of accomplishing something that God has led us to do. And it is the prosperity of knowing that accomplishing the things God calls us to do results in deep satisfaction and fulfillment that worldly success and prosperity can never bring."

Well said.

5. ...gives cheerfully.

2 Corinthians 9:7 can actually be translated "hilarious" giver. Notice that in 2 Corinthians 8:8 Paul makes it clear he is not commanding the churches to give. There is no command here to give in these chapters. And, actually there is no command in the New Testament. It is more like there is the assumption God's people are givers. And God certainly doesn't force us to give.

It's at this point people usually start debating tithing. You will hear things like, "Jesus doesn't talk about tithing, that's Old Testament stuff." Or "that's legalism and we're freed from that." Or, "Well, are we talking about tithing from the net or the gross?" But then we have to remind ourselves Jesus didn't free us from the Ten Commandments when He said He came to "fulfill" the Law. But what did Jesus mean when He said He fulfilled the law? He took us beyond the law. He equated hate with murder and lust with adultery. So where do you suppose He would take us beyond the tithe?

I've always appreciated an old, self-published book by W.T. Carlson called *The Sharecropper*. Carlson points out some interesting things about the tithe in the Old Testament. The first mention of the tithe is in Genesis 14:20 when Abraham gave a tithe of the re-captured goods he had gotten from neighboring kings. It is mentioned again in Genesis 28:13-15 when Jacob promised to give a tithe to God. **In neither case did God ask for a tithe.** Then in Exodus 35:4-5 and 29 where Moses told the people God had commanded an offering saying, "whosoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it, an offering of the Lord...the children of Israel brought a willing offering unto the Lord."

Wait a minute! How did “commanded” and “willing heart” get in the same verse? Remember, we worship a generous God who bestows unmeasurable grace. Here is yet another example of the fact that God does not force Himself, His love, or even His commandments on us. We have freedom to choose. In this case, the command is to establish an offering. Those with a willing heart are invited to give.

It was not until Leviticus 27:30 that the tithe was established and later in Numbers 18:20-24 Aaron was instructed to give the tithe to the Levites since their service to the people as worship leaders precluded their getting a share of the Promised Land. A second tithe is mentioned in Deuteronomy 12:5-19 and 14:22-27. This tithe was to be used to pay travel expenses for the Hebrews who made the required trip to Jerusalem three times a year to observe Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles and Feast of Weeks.

Then a third tithe is mentioned in Deuteronomy 14:28-29 and 26:12-15 as a tithe to be given every three years for distribution to the poor, the orphans and the widows of a community. This was called the Charity Tithe. Josephus, a noted first century Jewish historian, along with the Hebrew Scriptures, is a key source for the existence of these tithes. The Old Testament tithe is now up to 23 1/3 percent of a Hebrew’s income.

I suppose we can be grateful to not be tied to Old Testament legalism!

In Matthew 23:23, we have the words of Jesus declaring the tithe should be given, but not in a legalistic sense. He considered there were more important aspects of the law to be followed. New Testament giving, then, is giving abundantly, cheerfully, and sacrificially. Each believer is to decide or purpose in his own heart what he should give. **The standard is no longer a formula, but the cross of Christ.** What a difference that should make.

6. ...gives to promote thanksgiving to God.

Who gets the glory when we give generously? God gives grace, His people give generously, and God gets glory. The one who gives the grace always get the glory. We can celebrate this.

Transformation to Generosity: Making Application

In today’s lesson, we are being introduced to our church’s Journey of Generosity, a part of our GIVE HOPE: A Vision for the City campaign. The campaign focus is to provide adequate facilities to house City Light Ministries and God’s Little Ones (GLO) Day Care and to add space for an expanded Ministry of Counseling and Enrichment. Those of you who have been around First Baptist for many years will recognize the church has experienced several financial campaigns over the last thirty years to update our facilities – specifically, education space, music space, and sanctuary renovation. All of these were necessary and provided well for our “home base” to accomplish First Baptist’s mission in the Kingdom of God. Many new people and families have come to make First Baptist home.

Thirty years is a little more than what's considered "a generation." We have many in our congregation who were part of the generation who caught the vision for providing adequate facilities for the future of First Baptist. They put their minds, hearts, money and hands to work and, under God's leadership, helped make the vision a reality. Try to put your mind around the volume of transformed lives which have resulted from Abilene to the other side of the globe through the ministries of this church during that period of time. How has your own life been influenced or even transformed by your being a part of this body of Christ?

But GIVE HOPE is different. Have you considered the probability that most of the people who will be ministered to as a result of GIVE HOPE will never join "our" church? Is that a problem? Now, that doesn't mean lives won't be transformed. In fact, we believe there will be radical transformation taking place in many lives and families of our community.

A few weeks ago, our pastor shared with the GIVE HOPE Steering Committee a comment a pastor friend of his here in Abilene made about First Baptist. That pastor said,

"God has and is blessing First Baptist because it's an outward-focused church."

Doesn't that adequately sum up the heart of First Baptist? GIVE HOPE can be the vehicle God uses to propel First Baptist into its greatest mission venture yet. And doesn't our world need HOPE right now? Read prayerfully the following statements from those leading the efforts of our church to provide hope to Abilene and beyond:

The GLO Vision

by Allie Workman

The mission of GLO Day Care is to provide a safe, developmentally appropriate environment for children ages six-weeks to five-years old. Currently, we have eight classrooms and our capacity is 130. GLO'S new location will allow us to care for approximately 210 children.

The new building will provide space for an indoor multipurpose room for Science Fairs, an indoor play area for those rainy days and a private kitchen and dining room. The outdoor space will allow us to partner with Abilene Master Gardeners who could teach our children about the wonders of agriculture. It will also provide an age-appropriate playground. At a future date, we will be able to offer care to school-age children during school breaks and holidays.

The City Light Vision

by John Moore

City Light Community Ministries seeks to be God's presence to all who enter our doors. We want to be a tangible expression of love to our city and greater community. Our purpose comes from Jeremiah 29:7 which says, "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you...and pray to the Lord in its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare." Another translation says "do good things" for the city, which has become our new saying at City Light. CLCM focuses on meeting crisis needs, feeding anyone who is hungry, building biblical community, teaching children, and

helping people move out of poverty. A picture of heaven is seen each week through worship and many meals served each week.

The Ministry of Counseling and Enrichment Vision

by Steve Queen

Literally every day we have to turn down people referred to the Ministry of Counseling. They call hopeful to get help with their child who is struggling with behavioral or emotional issues. They call hoping to save their marriage. They call hopeful that someone can help them to recover from a loss or some trauma. They call hoping someone can help them to cope with depression or anxiety. Right now we have to tell them we can see them in 4 to 6 weeks, Hopefully!! If we are able to expand into the second floor of the B.O.B.s building we can bring on 4 to 6 new counselors, therapists, and maybe even a Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner. This would help save marriages and help offer hope to parents of children with emotional and behavioral issues as well as adults. I see our ministry as the friends of the paralytic. We ultimately know Jesus is the answer, but we need to tear away the layers of the roof so we can walk and live in relationship with Him fully. It is our sincere prayer and hope our congregation will accept the challenge of helping to expand our ability to fulfill our Mission to offer vital Christ centered resources to families of the Big Country, regardless of race, religion, or ability to pay.

Consider the fact that, in our Bible study today, Paul was addressing a church, the one at Corinth, and challenging it to be generous. He was able to remind them of the Macedonians because they had a reputation of being a “generous” church. So, how did it become generous? Because the leaders decided that was what the church needed to be? No, that’s not how our Lord’s churches become effective. The Macedonian church was generous because the people who comprised the church recognized generosity as a major discipline for their personal journey of spiritual growth. Their individual generosity resulted in a generous church.

Our church has a mission of making disciples, reaching people for Christ. The GIVE HOPE vision is about how that can happen as our current generation of members leaves a spiritual legacy of reaching beyond the walls of our church.

Next week, we’ll look at how generosity can become a spiritual habit or discipline for each of us. The following reflections will help you take some Next Steps on your journey.

During your next prayer appointment with God, try making the following requests:

1. Lord, make me more aware of your presence in my life.
2. Lord, help me see clearly what it would mean for my life to be poured out in response to your grace to benefit your Kingdom.
3. Lord, help me see what generosity would look like as my new life-style.

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Lesson Two: How Do I Become a Generous Person?

October 20, 2019

We all have treasure to some extent or other.

The question is, does our treasure have us or do we have it?

Ken Blanchard and Truett Cathy – [The Generosity Factor](#)

Money is not the easiest topic to talk about in church. In fact, some churches only reluctantly talk about it once a year during the annual “stewardship drive.” That being the case, how do churches deal with the fact that one-third of Jesus’ parables concern money or material possessions?

Paul notes, *“the love of money is the root of all sorts of evil.”* (I Timothy 6:10) Some people take this to mean money or material possessions themselves are evil. However, the questions of money or material things relates to our heart’s desires and determines whether we have our treasure or our treasure has us, as Cathy and Blanchard put it. They continue,

“Some people have money and use people, when we are supposed to love people and use money. Both poor and rich people can have a love of money. God wants us to turn away from the love of money to love and serve Him. He calls us to give generously to His church and to others so that we might prosper spiritually.”

This month in Sunday school, we’re exploring what it means to be on a Journey of Generosity, both as a church and as individuals. In November, Dr. Christopher will be challenging us to consider how we can help achieve the mission of our church – make disciples, reaching people for Christ – as we grow spiritually through our journeys of generosity and commitments to GIVE HOPE.

Another way to think about this is to ask, “Where am I in my spiritual journey of generosity?” And then, “What is my Next Step Forward?”

Last week, we looked at the Foundation of Generosity from the perspective of God’s Word. That was the big view. This week, we are looking at very practical steps in taking a Personal Journey of Generosity.

Stewardship and Generosity Start Young

While schools teach children how to read and write and eventually make a living, very few teach them how to manage money. Therefore, it's up to parents to teach their children about giving, saving, and managing well what is entrusted to them. How are parents to do that? Moses' words in Deuteronomy 6:6-7 offer good counsel. First, God's Word must be imprinted on our own hearts so our lives are a reflection of God's Word. The old adage is true: more is caught than taught.

Unfortunately, many parents are setting less than favorable examples for their kids in this area. Fewer than half of parents with school-aged children stick to a budget or pay off their credit cards in each billing cycle, according to a survey by the American Savings Education Council.

Quoted in the New York Times, Robert Duvall, president of the National Council on Economic Education, said, "Parents are often reluctant to talk about money, and perhaps that's related to the concern about practicing what we preach. If we talk about handling credit wisely, we have to do that ourselves, and the fact is we are not. When we counsel parents about the importance of using a budget or living within their means, it may serve as an added motivation to remind them that their adverse behaviors with money will impart to their children."

The second part of Moses' guidance focuses on discussing God's teachings frequently and consistently: "Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up." Clearly, teaching God's word to our children is not to be compartmentalized, but is to be brought into all aspects of our lives, financial and otherwise.

Let's Learn the Truth about Money

To become a generous person is to have a proper understanding of money itself. God's people, from Old Testament to New, have always given goods or money as an act of worship to God and as a way of tangible participation in the joy of seeing God's kingdom established on earth. In the Bible, God has much to say about money—mentioning money (or possessions) 2,172 times. God talks about what we own three times more than love and seven times more than prayer.

It's not as though our money and possessions are more important than those other matters, but how we use them serves as a reflection of our entire lives. We might say we love God and neighbor, or we might say we pray to Christ as Lord; but if our possessions have a stranglehold on our affections, then our words are hollow.

Richard Halverson says, "Jesus Christ said more about money than about any other single thing because, when it comes to a person's real nature, money is of first importance. Money is an exact index to a person's true character. All through Scripture there is an intimate correlation between the development of a person's character and how he handles his money."

*The lust for money in contemporary society has become psychotic.
It has completely lost touch with reality.*

Richard Foster

The poorest man I know is the man who has nothing but money.

John D. Rockefeller

Develop a Plan to Become Generous

As you read and consider the steps to becoming generous, which are presented here, be aware of where you are starting this journey and what your Next Step of Forward Movement would be. For example you might move from being:

- A non-giver to a **First Time** giver
- A sporadic giver to an **Intentional** giver (giving something regularly, either a fixed amount or a percent)
- A regular giver to a **Tither**
- A tither to a **Generous** giver
- A generous giver to a **More Generous** giver.

Step One: Determine your current situation.

There are generally four financial situations in which most people find themselves. They are:

- Crisis
- One paycheck from disaster
- Good “financial” shape
- God-honoring lifestyle.

Which situation most accurately describes you right now?

Step Two: Determine what you really believe about money.

As Dick Towner, director of Willow Creek’s Good \$ense financial planning ministry has said, “Our culture has created myths about money. You have to know your starting point.” The myths are:

- Things bring happiness
- Debt is expected and unavoidable
- A little more money will solve all your problems.

Chances are many of us not only buy into one of these myths, but perhaps into all three of them. There is a strong correlation connected with this myth triad which has a circular affect or pattern.

The truth that debunks these myths comes from the Matthew 6:21 passage referred to earlier. *“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”* **The implication is that every financial decision is a spiritual decision.** Matthew 6:21 forces us to ask the question, “Will God consider my financial decisions to be faithful or foolish?”

Step Three: Accept responsibility.

We need to remind ourselves God's Economy is comprised of the following truths:

- God created everything
- God owns everything
- We are trustees
- A trustee has no rights-only responsibilities.

How does your understanding of God's Economy affect your financial decisions, big and small?

Step Four: Determine what you really believe about giving.

Think about it. Giving financially is not just a "church deal." In our society, we are asked to contribute to all kinds of organizations, causes, and needs. From the coffee kitty at work, to the Girl Scout cookie vendor, to the United Way, to the college scholarship drive, to the guy on the street – there is a constant plea for your money. Your generosity is called into question almost daily, right? According to Towner, just as culture has created myths about money, it has also created several myths about giving which often affect your response to all these requests. They are:

- Give if it benefits you
- Give if there is anything left over
- Give out of a sense of duty.

It would be difficult to call anyone a generous giver if they are driven by any or all of these myths. No, rather a generous giver can be defined as:

*One who gives with obedient will, a joyful attitude,
and a compassionate heart.*

The fact is, we are created to give. God has built that into our nature because that is part of the nature of God Himself. Consider these passages describing God as giver.

*Thus says **God**, the Lord,
who created the heavens and stretched them out,
who spread out the earth and what comes from it,
who **gives breath** to the people on it **and spirit** to those who walk in it:*

Isaiah 42:5

*I charge you in the presence of **God**, who **gives life** to all things,*

I Timothy 6:13

*If any of you lacks **wisdom**, let him ask **God**, who **gives generously** to all without reproach, and it will be given him.*

James 1:5

Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

James 4:6

It is God who gives us breath, spirit, life, wisdom, and grace. He gives us “every good and perfect gift.” A part of His covenant with the Hebrew patriarchs, as recorded in Deuteronomy 8:18, even says He “gives them the power to get wealth” in order to fulfill the covenant. And therefore, God wants us to give, but our giving must mirror His giving. That would mean we give:

- As a response to God’s goodness
- To focus on God as our source of security
- To help achieve economic justice
- To bless others
- To break the hold of money.

We would certainly recognize this as only a minimal list of reasons to give in response to God’s giving. Try to add to the list those reasons which drive your own giving.

Step Five: Walk the Generous Journey.

The first assumption about beginning this journey of generosity is that we are willing to ask God how and how much He wants us to give. That’s a good request to pray right now before you even read further. One of the questions to settle with God is about the tithe. You can refer to the previous lesson for more information about the tithe, but in our present context, Towner makes an interesting observation: “The tithe is a wonderful goal to aspire to, but a terrible place to stop.” With that in mind, let’s look at a practical process toward generosity.

1. Begin by giving something. This may be your FIRST TIME to give.

The Key Question: How much of God’s money do I need to live on? Remember John Wesley’s story from the last lesson? Can you answer this question honestly? But if giving is so right and saving is so wise, why are they so hard to do? Part of that answer is because our culture has convinced us the appropriate order of financial decisions for our day is:

- Develop your lifestyle first
- Fund it with debt as necessary
- Create savings if anything is left
- Give if you feel obligated.

A God-honoring order, however, would be:

- Give
- Save
- Develop your Lifestyle.

See the difference? So while we’re in the transition to becoming a Generous Giver, here’s the order we can follow:

- Give something
- Save a little
- Maximize repayment of debt
- Develop a Spartan lifestyle.

Does “Spartan” scare us? What it really says is our goal should be to become prudent consumers. The result of that plan will be that we enjoy the fruits of our labor, yet we guard against materialism.

2. Build a Lifestyle on Three Biblical Principles:

a) **Beware of idols** - We are warned from the beginning in the Ten Commandments that we are to worship no one or no thing before God. The Israelites struggled with that commandment constantly. For example:

*“He (Amon) walked in all the way in which his father walked and served the idols that his father served and **worshipped** them.” (2 Kings 21:21)*

“After Amaziah came from striking down the Edomites, he brought the gods of the men of Seir and set them up as his gods and worshipped them, making offerings to them.” (2 Chronicles 25:14)

Gerald May, in his book Dark Night of the Soul, makes a strong case for how quickly we can let our attachments become addictions and then they soon become our idols. For Americans, materialism has become the idol of choice. Is it yours?

b) **Guard against greed** - Once again the Ten Commandments warn against covetousness, which easily translates to greed in our society. And there are more passages:

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.” (Matthew 23:25)

“Such are the ways of everyone who is greedy for unjust gain; it takes away the life of its possessors.” (Proverbs 1:19)

“For an overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain.” (Titus 1:7)

c) **Be content** - We can find no better example of how to live a life of contentment than Paul. After pleading with the Lord three times to remove the thorn from his flesh, he said:

“But He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest

upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Corinthians 12:9-11)

“Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.” (Philippians 4:11)

The writer of Hebrews nailed it by saying, *“Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’” (Hebrews 13:5)*

How have you been able to adopt these three principles to your life already? And since we’re talking “money,” let’s just go right to the bottom line:

Our possessions don’t determine our value to God.

Immediate Application:

None of the above information will be of much help until we come to a point of decision. That was true for salvation. It was true in making Christ the Lord of our lives. And it’s true about this spiritual discipline of generosity. It requires a decision.

That decision is to drive your lifestyle stake into the timeline of your life:
At some point in time you must say:

**Enough is enough.
I will distinguish between my true needs
and what culture says I need.
I will allow God to direct my giving
for His kingdom and His glory.**

Is NOW the time for you?

E. Glenn Hinson, retired professor of church history, reminds us to make this needed change in our lifestyle, we will need to learn to let go of stuff. Difficult, but we can do it. “In the same way that the power of Christ gives us the strength to cope with whatever life presents, so too should it enable us to let go. Paul underscored that as he appealed to the Corinthians to give generously for the relief offering he was trying to collect for the poor in Jerusalem. He pulled out all the stops on this appeal. If they sowed for blessings, they would reap blessing. God wants cheerful givers, not those forced to give. And he promised, ‘God will supply and magnify your sowing and increase the fruits of your righteous.’ (2 Cor. 9:10) Because of the power of Christ, we will have not only enough, but enough and to spare.”

What will be your Next Step of Forward Movement?

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GIVE HOPE

GIVE HOPE: First Baptist Abilene's Journey of Generosity

Lesson Three: Going Into All the World

October 27, 2019

Jesus, undeterred, went right ahead and gave His charge:

"God authorized and commanded me to commission you: Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I'll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age."

Matthew 28:19-20 (The Message)

Salvation is free, ... but discipleship will cost you your life.

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Until you have given up yourself to Him you will not have a real self.

- C.S. Lewis

This last lesson in the GIVE HOPE series focuses on the big picture of Kingdom work. The three mission ministries, which will be most impacted by the GIVE HOPE campaign, provide First Baptist with a platform for sharing hope and love with our Jerusalem (Abilene). Our work in Abilene is certainly broader than these three, but these ministries line up with the vision Jesus gave to the first century church. Through these ministries we care for children, we counsel and support families, and we provide meals, training, and friendship with the homeless.

Consider the various ministries and missions you are presently involved in. These are all opportunities which put hands and feet to our faith commitment. All of these opportunities demonstrate the desire of First Baptist, Abilene to be obedient to our Lord's Great Commission and to His instruction to be witnesses from Abilene to the ends of the earth. So what might be the Next Steps on each of our spiritual journeys which would put us in the heart of this commission? Another way to put it is to ask, "How do I become the disciple-maker Christ has called me to be?" We need to consider what that looks like personally and corporately in the life of our church.

Many of you have read and been challenged by the book, *Radical* by David Platt. Platt wrote another book titled, *Follow Me*. The book leads those of us who have accepted the "follow me" call of Jesus to a response to the Great Commission given by Jesus as recorded in Matthew

28:19-20. The last two chapters of the book provide for us a great guide to our Next Steps. This final lesson in our GIVE HOPE: Journey to Generosity series provides a review of these chapters as a challenge for us to be intentional about living a lifestyle which facilitates making disciples.

A Portrait of the Early Church

When you think of the first century church, what comes to your mind? David Platt describes that church as “a small band of twelve men who responded to a life-changing invitation: ‘Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.’” As they followed, they watched Jesus, listened to Him, and learned from Him how to love, teach, and serve others the same way He did. They witnessed His death on a cross for their sins. And they experienced His resurrection from the dead three days later. Finally, He gathered them on a mountainside and said to them,

*“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.
Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name
of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all that
I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

Matthew 28:18-20 (ESV)

Jesus also instructed His followers to go and wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the One He promised who would empower them to fulfill this new commission. And that’s what they did. They waited in that upper room until Jesus’ promise was fulfilled. The day came when the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, came to every one of them, and immediately they began proclaiming the gospel. From Jerusalem, they scattered to Judea to Samaria to the ends of the earth, “...and within one generation, they grew to over four hundred times the size they were when they started. How did this happen?” How did the church grow?

Consider that the first century had none of the buildings, programs, or trained leaders that we have today. Platt points out it was through the efforts of unnamed followers, not the apostles, “who first took the gospel to Judea and Samaria, and it was unnamed believers who founded the church at Antioch, which became a base for mission to the Gentile world. Everyday people whose lives had been transformed by the power of Christ were leading people to faith in Jesus on a daily basis.” This was happening in the routine of life.

“Self-denying, Spirit-empowered disciples of Jesus were making disciples of Jesus. Christians were not known for belonging to a Christian church; instead, they were known for complete abandonment to Christ and his cause”... even in the face of untold trials and unthinkable persecution.

Platt says this kind of movement involves all of us; every single follower of Christ making disciples. “Ordinary people would be spreading the gospel in extraordinary ways all over the world. Men and women from diverse backgrounds with different gifts and distinct platforms would be making disciples and multiplying churches through every domain of society in every place on the planet. This is God’s design for His church, and disciples of Jesus must not settle for anything less.”

For Reflection:

1. Could it be possible for the church to grow in the U.S. in our day the way it did in the first century? Why or why not? How is the church doing in the rest of the world?
2. What do you think is the growth potential for First Baptist, Abilene?
3. What do we have working for us to achieve the Great Commission? What is working against us?
4. How could your background, gifts, and platform benefit the **GIVING HOPE** in Abilene and around the world?

A SIMPLE STRATEGY

With this challenge of understanding Jesus' own vision for how His church would assist in bringing in the Kingdom of God, Platt invites us to journey with him to see Jesus' simple strategy at work. He tells the story of a country where conversion to Christianity is outlawed. It is illegal to share the gospel with a Muslim in this Middle Eastern nation, and it is illegal for a Muslim to become a Christian. Because of this, you might expect the gospel to be silenced, but thankfully that's not the case.

Platt tells the story of a small group of Christians who are making disciples and multiplying churches in this country.

"These brothers and sisters are not flashy; on the contrary, they are pretty plain. As they live in this country, they are simply running a successful business that employs Muslim men and women. Along the way, they are purposefully loving people and leading them to eternal life in Christ. Their strategy is simple: make disciples based on Matthew 28:18-20."

"They start by sharing the gospel. Now, you may wonder, *I thought it was illegal for them to share the gospel, so how can they do that?* Under the Spirit's guidance, they are wise in the ways they share the gospel. Their goal is to sew threads of the gospel into the fabric of every interaction with lost people. In every conversation, in every business dealing, at every meal, and in every meeting, they look for opportunities to speak about who God is, how God loves, what God is doing in the world, and supremely what God has done for us in Christ. Of course, not every conversation involves a full-on, hour-long gospel explanation. They simply try to saturate all of their interactions with various strands of the gospel, like weaving various colored threads into a fabric. Their prayer is that in time, God will open the eyes of men and women around them to behold the tapestry of the gospel, and they will come to Christ."

According to Platt:

“People were open to listening because of the way these followers of Christ were living their lives. Plainly put, the believers that worked together in this business had earned the right to be heard. They were honest in their work, and they honored the people with whom they worked. They cared for each other and for the people around them in poignant ways. When other employees in the business went through hard times, these brothers and sisters showed God’s love. When coworkers were sick or in need, these brothers and sisters asked if they could pray for them. Most of the time, these coworkers gladly said yes. As Christians prayed for them in Jesus’ name, these Muslim men and women saw a visual illustration of God’s goodness that matched the continual conversations they hear about God’s grace.”

(You can read the full account of this story in the book, *Follow Me*.)

For Reflection:

1. Platt raised the following question: “*Why does a similar strategy not characterize the life of every single follower of Christ in the world?*” How would you answer him?
2. To what degree do you believe God has placed every one of us in different locations with different jobs and different gifts around different people for the distinct purpose of every single one of us making disciples and multiplying churches?
3. As you think about the opportunities provided for you by First Baptist, Abilene for ministry and missions, which ones seem to line up with your gifts, abilities, and passion?
4. What stands in the way of your signing on for that mission? How can that barrier be overcome?

SEWING GOSPEL THREADS

Consider this definition of the gospel often used by Platt:

The Good News that the just and gracious God of the universe has looked upon hopelessly sinful people and sent his Son, Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, to bear his wrath against sin on the cross and to show his power over sin in the Resurrection so that everyone who turns from sin and trusts in him will be reconciled to God forever.

In this gospel statement, we find various components which every one of us can articulate. Platt believes, “Every follower of Christ knows who God is, what man’s ultimate problem is, who Jesus is and what He has done, how someone can be saved and how important it is for people to be saved.” He challenges us to “incorporate the character of God, the sinfulness of man, the sufficiency of Christ, the necessity of faith, and the urgency of eternity into our everyday conversations. And, as we thread this Good News into the fabric of every interaction we have with people around us, let’s pray that God will open eyes to see the tapestry of his glory and believe the gospel of his grace.”

He then presents three practical suggestions:

1. Speak about God:

Let’s speak continually to the people around us about God as someone we know, love, and worship, instead of speaking like atheists, attributing circumstances around us to chance or coincidence. Let’s put God’s character on display every day before people who may not yet believe in Him. Let’s speak about God as Creator, as Judge, and as Savior in the context of our everyday conversations.

2. Speak about man’s problem - sin:

Similarly, let’s speak about the ultimate problem of man: sin. It may not be the most effective conversation starter to walk up to a coworker at the water cooler and abruptly say, “You’re a damned and dreadful sinner in need of salvation.” At that moment, the only thing that person will want to be saved from is you. Many, if not most, unbelievers are offended that you would even suggest they need to “be saved.” However, that doesn’t mean we need to hide the reality of sin in our everyday conversations. Let’s speak humbly about the seriousness of sin in our lives and in a world full of evil, suffering, sickness, pain, and death.

3. Speak about Jesus:

Then, let’s speak clearly and compassionately about the person and work of Jesus on a daily basis. Let’s talk about His life – the people He healed, things He taught, miracles He performed, and ways He served. Let’s speak about His death. Do the people around you know how grateful you are for the cross of Christ? And let’s proclaim His resurrection. As Christians, we talk about difficulties in this world with deep hope and unusual joy. Every trial we face, no matter how difficult, is an occasion to point people to God-given satisfaction that supersedes suffering in this life.

Rick Warren would agree. Some of you may remember Day 36 in Warren’s Purpose Driven Life when we studied it together as a church in 2002.

a. Acts 20:24: The most important thing is that I complete my mission, the work that the Lord Jesus gave me.

b. “You were made for a mission. God is at work in the world, and He wants you to join Him. This assignment is called your mission. God wants you to have both a ministry in the Body

of Christ and a mission in the world. Your ministry is your service to believers, and your mission is your service to unbelievers. Your life mission is both shared and specific. One part of it is a responsibility you share with every other Christian, and the other part is an assignment that is unique to you.... Jesus calls us not only to come to Him, but also to go for Him. One problem long-term Christians have is that they forget how hopeless it felt to be without Christ. We must remember that no matter how contented or successful people appear to be, without Christ they are hopelessly lost and headed for eternal separation from God. The Bible says, 'Jesus is the only One who can save people.' Everybody needs Jesus.... Your mission has eternal significance. It will impact the eternal destiny of other people, so it's more important than any job, achievement, or goal you will reach during your life on earth. The consequences of your mission will last forever; the consequences of your job will not. Nothing else you do will ever matter as much as helping people establish an eternal relationship with God."

c. This is why we must be urgent about our mission. Jesus said, "All of us must quickly carry out the tasks assigned us by the one who sent me, because there is little time left before the night falls and all work comes to an end."

For Reflection:

1. How do you respond to Platt's definition of the Gospel?
2. How do you see yourself practicing Platt's three suggestions?
3. What are the common ideas expressed by Platt and Warren?

ALL NATIONS

As disciples of Jesus, we have a three-fold task to share, show, and teach God's Word. "This is what it means to make disciples, and Jesus has told us to do this in all nations. The phrase that Jesus uses for "all nations" in Matthew 28:19 is *panta ta ethne*, which literally means all of the ethnicities, or peoples, of the world."

Platt continues:

"Many people misunderstand this verse, thinking that Jesus is talking about nations like we think of nations today. Approximately two hundred geopolitical nations exist today, but these are not the nations Jesus is referring to. Clearly Jesus was not talking about the United States of America because, well, the United States of America didn't exist in the first century. Instead, He was talking about families, tribes, and clans that are commonly called people groups today.

Interestingly, the Bible ends with a portrait of men and women from every single one of these people groups represented around the throne of Christ, singing the praises of God...." The book of Revelation (7:9-10) envisions a scene where,

" ... I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number,

from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'"

Earlier in Revelation 5:9, we read that,

"they sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.'"

Platt points out we're not doing all that great with our task. "Out of over eleven thousand people groups represented in the world today, over six thousand of them are still classified as 'unreached' with the gospel. To be 'unreached' technically means that a particular people group is less than 2 percent evangelical Christian."

For Reflection:

1. What does this understanding of "nations" mean for your fulfilling the Great Commission?
2. What has God laid on your heart about reaching other people groups for Christ?
3. What experience or abilities do you bring to the table to help reach these people groups?

Next Steps for You

PRAYING, GIVING, GOING

1. So we pray.

Let's pray for disciples to be made and churches to be multiplied here in Abilene, in the United States, and among the six thousand people groups around the world who are yet to be reached. Will you commit to GIVE HOPE as part of your prayer life?

2. We give.

Under God's leadership we make decisions about our movement through our own Journey of Generosity. Will you commit to GIVE HOPE as you accept one of these forward movements of giving?

Non-giver → Intentional Giver → Tither → Generous Giver → More Generous Giver

3. And **we go**.

In a variety of different ways through a variety of different avenues to a variety of different peoples, we go. We go to partner wisely with long-term disciple makers and long-term disciple-making processes around the world, including here in the U.S. So will you commit to be **ALL IN**, as the Lord leads, for a week, two months, two years, or a lifetime?

Here's how **John Moore, Pastor for Missions**, sums up our praying, giving, and going:

FBC Abilene seeks to be God's presence and express God's love to our city, state, nation, and world. This Acts 1:8 model of missions involves going and partnering with like-minded believers to bring and tell the Good News. In cooperation, we're able to build beloved community, give witness to Jesus Christ, and work together toward transformational change in people's lives and communities. FBC has a real heart for community transformation, refugees and orphans, ministry training, disaster relief, and people making long-term commitments around our world. God commands us to care for those who are perceived as unlovely and forgotten and build community. There is no greater joy than to be God's presence wherever the opportunity is opened up by God and the Holy Spirit.

For Reflection:

1. To what degree do you accept the claim that all followers of Jesus are disciple-makers?
 2. Do your prayers reflect a concern for praying for the lost of the world?
 3. How will your **Journey of Generosity** impact fulfilling the Great Commission?
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