



Central Peninsula Church

...to make and mature more followers of Christ

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Deuteronomy 14:22-16:17
Rob Hall
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A Generous People

SERIES: *Turning Point: Start Fresh/Stay the Course*

A couple of weeks ago I got to golf with two of our staff and one of our elders at the Olympic Club for a golf tournament to raise money for the Chinese Hospital. It was my first time at this amazing course and the only reason why I was there was because of the generosity of a couple in our church. They emailed me and asked if I could put together a foursome of pastors or elders from CPC for this tournament that they were sponsoring. Well, that was one of those decisions that I didn't really need to pray about! I jumped at the opportunity and was absolutely excited to play at not only one of the best courses in the Bay Area, but in the entire country. In fact, the US Open will be held there in 2010.

The day came to golf and the weather was amazing. We had a ton of fun, we got some cool swag (free gifts) and we ate as many of their special tasty hamburgers that we could get our hands on. Golfing for me is a great chance to get some exercise, get my mind of things, enjoy friends and compete. It was an epic day in many ways and as I reflect back on it, I was just so grateful for the generosity of this couple. They really blessed me.

Have you ever been blessed by someone's generosity before? It's a wonderful thing.

On the flip side, there have been a few times where I've got to experience the joy of being generous as well. Several years ago I used to drive a 1986 Ford Ranger. It was a great truck that served me well. Before having our first child, Missy and I knew it was time to get a more kid friendly car. We bought a used SUV and were thinking about what to do with my old truck. We decided that instead of selling it and making a few bucks, that we would give it to a friend of ours who was also a local missionary. He was in dire need of a car and so we gave it to him. He was just overjoyed at our generosity. The amazing thing about it was that Missy and I were the ones who felt blessed to have had the means to give him a car. It really was a joy.

What about you, have you ever experienced the joy of generosity? I am sure many of you have.

There is something about generosity that is truly amazing, whether you are on the receiving end or the giving end. There is a sense of blessing involved on both sides. Winston Churchill said a great line that is worth repeating: "We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give."

I wonder if we would all really agree with that statement. We are currently living in a culture that is far

from generous. And I do not know about your heart, but I know when I look into mine there are times that I can see the ugly head of greed surface.

Have you ever felt greed in your own life? For things? For money? If you think about it, the things some people will do for self-gratification and greed is really insane. Our economy is just one example of greed gone wild and unchecked.

We can either curse the darkness of the sin of greed, or we can light a match with the light of generosity. Let's light a match, shall we?

This morning we are continuing our series through the book of Deuteronomy and here we find the nation of Israel about to enter the Promised Land. God knows that they are going to experience his many blessings and that they will be tempted to hoard the blessings for themselves. Thankfully we are not alone in our struggle to fight greed and live generously. In this text, we are going to uncover the secret to living a blessed life. The secret has to do with generosity. We are going to uncover three areas that God wants his people to be generous in—our resources, our relationships, and our celebrations. The first area God wants Israel to be generous with is their resources, their wealth.

"You shall tithe all the yield of your seed that comes from the field year by year. And before the LORD your God, in the place that he will choose, to make his name dwell there, you shall eat the tithe of your grain, of your wine, and of your oil, and the firstborn of your herd and flock, that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always. And if the way is too long for you, so that you are not able to carry the tithe, when the LORD your God blesses you, because the place is too far from you, which the LORD your God chooses, to set his name there, then you shall turn it into money and bind up the money in your hand and go to the place that the LORD your God chooses and spend the money for whatever you desire—oxen or sheep or wine or strong drink, whatever your appetite craves. And you shall eat there before the LORD your God and rejoice, you and your household. And you shall not neglect the Levite who is within your towns, for he has no portion or inheritance with you. At the end of every three years you shall bring out all the tithe of your produce in the same year and lay it up within your towns. And the Levite, because he has no portion or

inheritance with you, and the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, who are within your towns, shall come and eat and be filled, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands that you do” (Deut. 14:22–29).

I. Generous with our resources.

Before I go any further, let me stop and give a disclaimer. Some of you are thinking, “Oh great, here we go, the church is going to talk about money.” I get that and understand, there are many money hungry people and church based organizations that always talk about giving and money. I am very sensitive to that fact. But here at CPC, we teach the Bible, God’s word. And when you do that, there is no escaping how much the Bible talks about money. From here in Deuteronomy all the way to the teachings of Jesus, the Bible says a lot about money. There are a couple of thousand verses on money and wealth to be exact. Why? God does not want or need your money. He owns everything. “The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it,” says the Psalmist. What God wants is not your money, but your heart, because when he has your heart, he has all of you, even your wallet.

This sermon really has little to do with money. Instead, it has everything to do with the attitude of our hearts (15:7). If you leave here thinking that we want your money and that was the point of the sermon, you will be mistaken. CPC does not want your money; we want your heart. We want you to fully surrender your life at the foot of Jesus and say, “All that I am, all that I ever hope to be, I give to you Lord.”

A. Tithe: Moses goes straight to the heart of the matter and talks to Israel about their resources. He tells them that they need to give a tithe of all their produce, aka, their income. Now, in an agrarian society like theirs, income was earned from farming: grain, oil, wine and flocks. Moses tells them to tithe. Literally a tithe means a tenth, 10 percent. There are actually two tithes mentioned here. The first goes straight to the Temple and the second (v.28), the one given after three years goes to the Levites who cared for the Temple. In addition there were other offerings and tithes. It is amazing if you think about it—they were told to give 30-40% to the Lord!

There are several purposes he gives for the tithe. These are important and I want you to take note. First, tithing is a way they will learn to fear God (v.23). The word “learn” in the original language literally means training and education. And “fear” meant proper or righteous living. In other words the Christian life is a process of education in proper living, which is reflected in our lifestyle. What does that mean? It is true, we all need to learn to fear God.

Let me illustrate this point: Take for example the ocean. I love the ocean! I love to swim in it, surf it, snorkel in it, and fish it. At the same time, I greatly fear and

respect the ocean. I know that when I am out in the middle of it how fragile my little life can be. The same is true with God. I love and enjoy being in God’s presence. However, I also fear, respect and revere him. My life is in his hands. All learning is ultimately found in the fear of the Lord. It is coming to terms with the will and law of God. Remember, the verse “fear of the Lord is”...what?...” the beginning of wisdom” says the Psalmist. Tithing was a means of instruction for Israel to learn how to fear God.

Secondly, the tithe was meant to give them joy (v.26). Joy! The act of giving generously will give them joy and their household joy. Joy, unlike happiness, is a choice. And in God’s economy they will receive joy when they give.

Third, the tithe was a system of poverty relief. The blessing of God was meant to be shared with the Levite, the alien, the orphan, and the widow. The Levite, much like pastors today, had to depend on the generosity of the congregation to meet their needs. The alien (the outsider), the orphan and the widow all depended on the generosity of the community to survive. I will unpack this point a little more in a minute.

Lastly, the purpose of the tithe was to enjoy and receive the blessing of God. Ten times in these two chapters the word blessing is used. Verse 29 says that they are to give a tithe, “in order that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do.” How many of you want God’s blessing on your life and on your resources? We all do, right? How do we get it? In order to be blessed, we are to be a blessing.

Way back in Genesis 12:1-3, God meets with Abraham and they form an agreement, a covenant. Here is what God says: “**Now the LORD said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’”**

Do you see God’s heart here? The blessing of God was and always is meant to be shared. Do you want to be blessed by God? Then share the blessing he has already given you. God has blessed us all materially, with our health, with different resources, with our time, and with various talents. All of these things are meant to be used to bless others and in return, God blesses us! It’s really amazing.

Tithing is a way we learn to fear God, to experience joy, it is how we care for the poor and it is a way to experience God’s blessing in our own lives. When you think about tithing, do you think about it these ways? For me, this really gave me some fresh perspective. How are you doing in this area of your life? Are you generous with your resources? Are you a “cheerful giver” that the Apostle Paul describes in 2 Corinthians? Joy and blessing can be experienced when we are generous with our resources.

Not only does Moses command Israel to be generous with their resources, he then tells them that they need to be generous in their relationships.

"At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release. And this is the manner of the release: every creditor shall release what he has lent to his neighbor. He shall not exact it of his neighbor, his brother, because the LORD's release has been proclaimed."... "If among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be. Take care lest there be an unworthy thought in your heart and you say, 'The seventh year, the year of release is near,' and your eye look grudgingly on your poor brother, and you give him nothing, and he cry to the LORD against you, and you be guilty of sin. You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him, because for this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake."... "If your brother, a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you, he shall serve you six years, and in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you. And when you let him go free from you, you shall not let him go empty-handed. You shall furnish him liberally out of your flock, out of your threshing floor, and out of your winepress. As the LORD your God has blessed you, you shall give to him. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this today" (15:1-2, 7-10, 12-15).

II. Generous with our relationships.

Remember, if you will, that Deuteronomy is Moses' explanation, commentary, and application of the 10 Commandments. The verses that we have just read are his commentary on commandment #4, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy". Every seventh year we are told is a "Sabbatic year", a year of release. There are three relationships that are accounted for in the year of release, those you loan money to, the poor, and slaves.

A. Remission of debts: The first relationship deals with people who are in debt. The terms of these loans are pretty sweet. After seven years the debt is released. Gone. Your mortgage, your car note, your credit card balance, all of it is erased. Raise your hand if that sounds really good to you right now! This is awesome for those who are in debt, but seems crazy for those who are owed the money! There is some debate at whether the debts are completely canceled or if they are just put off for one year. Whatever the case, this is still pretty amazing. This was not socialism or even

capitalism. This was God's way to give every man equal opportunity for success. It was a way to guard against both extreme poverty and extreme wealth. Jim Wallis reminds us that, "The Bible doesn't mind prosperity; it just insists that it be shared."

I also love here how God knows the human heart. Did you catch what Moses says in verse 9? Basically he says, "Hey, don't withhold a loan from someone in year 6 because year 7 is right around the corner!" This idea here may seem radical and unfair to those who are lenders, but I think there is a jewel of wisdom here. Think about our economy right now. What would happen if millions of American Christians actually tithed 10% and were debt free? Do you realize what could be done for the kingdom? We could solve world hunger, make a huge dent with the AIDS pandemic in Africa, get clean water to millions, fix our own country's poverty and care for millions of orphans, just to name a few causes.

B. How you treat the poor: The second relationship of concern is with the poor. The idea is that in God's covenant community, there will be no poor (v.4), but the reality is that this is not a perfect community. In these verses God commands the poor to be taken care of. It is not an option, it is not just a good idea, and it is essential to the well being of the community. The imagery given is that of a closed fist and of an open hand. Moses tells them to be open handed when it comes to the poor. They are told to give generously to the poor and when they do they will be blessed.

Augustine of Hippo said it this way, "Find out how much God has given you and take from it what you need; the remainder is needed by others." Another writer said, "The idea here is that poor and needy people BELONG, they are not just social statistics." That is what I love about our church. On any given Sunday, a CEO can be sitting next to someone who has been out of work for months. We are not a successful church for successful people. We are a broken church for broken people.

C. Hebrew slaves: The third relationship that they are told to be generous are with Hebrew slaves. The reality is that in the Ancient Near East and even today, there are slaves. This does not mean that the Bible condones slavery, it does not. It was common for Hebrews to sell themselves as slaves. For most it was a matter of survival. But the reality and the graciousness of God here is that there is even provision for generosity to be given to slaves. After six years, they are to be set free. If they want to stay, they can, but if not, let them go. Not only that, but slave owners are commanded to liberally bless them from their flocks and produce. Hook them up God says! Why? Again, because God has blessed you and you are to be a blessing. Furthermore God says that I want you to remember every time you do this that you too were once slaves in Egypt. Israel was a society of escaped slaves. Don't forget where you come from God says.

Debts, the poor, and slavery are all further ways Israel can live generously. Here is the amazing thing about this system God wanted in place. He promises that if we look after those in debt, the poor, and the slaves, their economy will not suffer. God will bless you, take care of you, and meet your needs. There is power in joyful generosity.

How are you doing in your relationships? Are you generous with your family and friends? Does someone owe you money? Are you in the place to release them? Are you generous to the poor? While we don't own slaves, we do have people that work for us or at our homes. Are we generous to them?

The last area Moses tackles is in the celebrations of Israel. He tells them to party generously. Let me summarize these three festivals.

III. Generous with your Celebrations (16:1-17).

A. The Passover: The first festival, the Passover, was a celebration of their time in Egypt when the Angel of Death "passed over" the firstborn male children of Israel on the night of the exodus. There would be a sacrifice of an unblemished lamb, they would eat bread without yeast, and would remember how God delivered them out of Egypt.

B. Festival of Weeks (Pentecost): The second festival mentioned is the feast of Weeks or Pentecost. After seven weeks, they are told to bring a freewill offering to the Lord. God commands them to rejoice in his presence with his whole household including the Levites, the alien, the orphan and widow.

C. Festival of Booths: The third festival is the feast of Booths. Seven days after the harvest they are told to gather grain from the threshing floor and wine from their vat, and what is left over are to be given to the Lord for the Levite, the alien, the orphan and the widow. Sound familiar.

The purpose and the point of these feasts again have to deal with generosity. They are meant for joy (v.15). They are meant to care for those who are in need. And they are also meant to share God's blessing (v.17).

God commanded Israel to celebrate him! To party, to rejoice, and to include those less fortunate in the celebration. We need the poor as much as they need us—we get a bigger picture of God's kingdom when we fellowship with the poor. This is one area that as a church we can really excel in. For centuries, churches have gotten together to eat. Did you know that in the early church, communion was once called an "agape meal," a love feast? It wasn't just a piece of cracker and grape juice. After church was over communion would be taken together along with a meal. Both rich and poor were together.

Strong, vibrant and healthy churches make it a habit to eat together. That is one reason we are having a meal after this service. To be together and celebrate what God is doing in our midst. Christians should love to eat and gather around the table! Why do we celebrate communion? It is all a celebration of the goodness of the Lord. It is a meal that we eat together.

How are you doing in this area? Is your home and family known as a place of hospitality and celebratory dinners?

CONCLUSION

The Big Idea from this text this morning is this: God's blessing is both the reason we give and the result of our giving. Because God has blessed us, we are to be generous people. By living generously, we will experience God's blessing and will prosper.

Practically let me give you a few more ways to live generously:

1. Give your Time. I believe that time, more than money, is the most precious commodity any of us have. You can always earn more money, but we all only have a limited time, 24 hours a day. I want to encourage you to serve at one of our upcoming service outreach events.

2. Use your Talent. God has given all of us different gifts, talents, personalities, passions, strengths, and abilities. Practically, here at CPC we still have a few opportunities that you can serve. Again, look at the insert. You do not have to serve here at CPC, serve somewhere else!

3. Give your Treasure. We are told to give generously to the Lord. The funny thing is that in the Old Testament, a tenth was just a beginning point. If you factor in all the various tithes and offerings a Hebrew was supposed to give, it exceeded 40%. I would practically challenge you to up your giving one percent. God tells us in Micah to test him in this area and if we do, we will not be disappointed.

Finally, as I stated in the beginning, God doesn't need your money, your time, or your talent. He wants your heart. I did not intend to heap any guilt on anyone. That is not the Gospel of grace. Why does the Bible call us to live generously? Because God is generous. Think about all the blessing and opportunities he has given you. It is God's nature to give. In fact he loved you so much that he gave his one and only Son to die in your place. At the cross Jesus defeated sin, death, and Satan and he rose to give you new life. True generosity is the overflow of a heart that has been captivated by Jesus. If you have not placed your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, I would encourage you to surrender your life to him. He wants your heart.