

Living Generously

Session 2: More Than a Feeling

Edited Transcript

Brett Clemmer

Brett Clemmer: All right. Well, good morning, gentlemen. We are in our second session of our series on generous living. This week is called More Than a Feeling, like the Boston song, the song from the Boston album back in 1976 when I was in I think seventh grade and I lived in Lexington, Massachusetts, which was a great place to live in 1976 because of all the bicentennial stuff and the shot heard around the world and we celebrated in Lexington. Boston was that band. It's interesting. This is a total aside here, but it's interesting. The guy that wrote this song was a little depressed, but he was an amazing musician. His last name was Scholz. They started this band called Boston. On the first album, all the instrumentals on the first Boston album were played by this one guy. Then he built a band after he did the album. Then he built the band around it and then got other people to play the instruments so they could actually do concerts. Then they went on to release seven or eight albums. More Than a Feeling is, according to Billboard Magazine, one of their lists, was the 37th best rock song of all time. I don't know if that means anything or if you care, but we are going to talk about More Than a Feeling.

What are we talking about when we talk about More Than a Feeling? What we're talking about is that a lot of times, as we think about generous living, the motivation for our generous living is love. Love is the motivation. In our society, we've created this definition of love as sort of this ooey gooeey feeling that you have that is not the love of the Bible. It's a feeling. It's like, you know, it's getting all teary-eyed or all goopy about things. That's not what love is. Love is one of the manliest actions that you can take. Love is not a feeling. Love is an action. We're going to talk about how does love fit into the generous living of the disciple today. Before we do that, let's give a shout out. Today's shout out goes to Expressions Discipleship, a group of 10 men that meets at the leader's home, Alfaw William in Ogden, Utah. They're an urban ministry reaching the streets of gangs and drugs, et cetera. Let's give these guys in Ogden, Utah a big welcome, a big Man in the Mirror welcome. One, two, three, hoorah. All right, guys, we're so glad that you're with us this morning.

We've been in this series, generous living series, and you remember last week we talked about the idea of faith and trust, that you can trust God. He's given you more than you need so that you can take the excess and invest it in his

kingdom. That's how God supports his kingdom. He takes a few people and he gives them more than they need so that they can then resource the rest of the kingdom. We're those guys. We're American men. We're those guys. We're the few because we have more resources than 99.5% of the rest of the world. It's our responsibility as children of the King to resource the rest of the kingdom. That's what we do. You can trust God to give you what you need to do that. You don't have to hold onto things tightly. You can hold things with a loose hand. Today we're going to talk about love and the fact that love is an action. Love is something we do, not something we just feel. Then, next week we're going to talk about how to create habits because of our hope, our expectation for what's to come. What do we need to do now to create the habits because of those expectations?

More Than a Feeling. There is sort of a legend. It's been attributed to Sitting Bull, but I found it in a few other places. It's a story about an old Cherokee teaching his grandson about life. It goes like this. "A fight is going on inside me," he said to his grandson, "It's a terrible fight and it is between two wolves. One is evil. He is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego." He continued, "The other is good. He is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. The same fight is going on inside of you," he told his grandson, "and inside of every other person too." The grandson thought about it for a minute and then he asked his grandfather, "Which wolf will win?" The grandfather said, "The one you feed."

Now, this is a Cherokee legend, but it sort of mirrors something that the Bible talks about, that Paul talks about, for instance, in Romans seven when he talks about, "I don't do the things I want to do," that's the evil wolf, "and I do the things I don't want to do. Who can save me from my flesh?" That's basically the Bible calls that evil wolf the flesh. The good wolf the Bible calls the Spirit, the Spirit of God living in us. Which one do you feed? Which one do you nurture? Love is a way of nurturing the presence of the Spirit inside of our hearts. As we nurture the Spirit, as we allow the Spirit to have more and more control in our lives, it amplifies its impact. The Spirit of God, the Bible talks about quenching the Spirit.

It doesn't use those exact words. That's sort of what we've used that phrase, but when you live out the Spirit of God in your life more and more, it becomes more and more a feature of your life. If you want to live generously, you have to live generously in order to live generously. In other words, you have to practice it. You have to go out there and do it. You have to be generous, be intentional. The more you do that, the more you'll want to do it, the more it changes who you are even as the power of the Spirit takes hold more and more over your flesh. Will you nourish the flesh or will you nourish the Spirit as it acts in your life? This is the question that we have to answer for ourselves.

Today we're going to talk about how love is more than a feeling. We're going to talk about everyday stewardship. We're going to look at a passage in Luke three

and talk about everyday stewardship. Then we're going to talk about a passage in 1 John about what is love. Then we're going to talk about what should this look like in the church. What should this look like in the church? I'm going to give you one story of a person living incredibly generously and then I'm going to ask you guys to share some stories of people that you know that have done something that has built their life around living generously. I'm telling you that now so maybe those thoughts can begin to fester in the back of your mind a little bit and you can begin to think about somebody that you know that lives a generous life and you can share about that. You'll have 30 seconds. You got to do it quick so we can get a few people in. We're going to have you guys share and that will wrap us up.

As we jump into this, turn to Luke chapter three and let's pray before we dive into God's word. Father, we are so grateful for you. You are the model. You are the definition of generosity, you who loved us so much that you gave your Son for us. Christ, you are the picture of generosity. You are the example that we need to follow. You gave up your life for us. Spirit, you inspire us to generosity. You, Holy Spirit, you live within us, those who follow Jesus and you inspire us. You show us how to be generous. Lord God, we pray this morning that you would inspire us through your word, that you would teach us how to live a generous life, Lord, that we would understand love in a new way and live it out in our lives every day. In Jesus's name, amen.

Well, Luke chapter three. Turn to Luke chapter three and let's talk about everyday stewardship. John the Baptist in Luke chapter three, John the Baptist has just come on the scene in Luke's telling of the gospel. He's out there. He's in the wilderness. He's kind of got a big personality. He's preaching repentance. Now, this is an interesting thing to teach to the Jews because they're the chosen people of God. "Why should we need to repent? We're the chosen people of God." John says, "Because you're sinners. You're filthy, rotten sinners." They don't like hearing that stuff, but they know it's true and so they're flocking to him and they're listening to him. Then, he's baptizing them, John the Baptist, as a symbol of them cleansing. They say, "What must we do? How do we have to live our lives to show that we have now repented?" John the Baptist does not go into this sort of theological sermon about the Christian life. He doesn't give them a set of doctrines that they need to believe and if they just believe the right things, then that will show that they are repentant. No, what he does is three different groups of people ask him, "What do we have to do?"

We're going to pick up the story in verse 10, Luke 3:10. There's three different groups of people that asked him. It's fascinating to listen to his answers. The crowds asked him, "So what then shall we do?" And he answered them, "Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none and whoever has food is to do likewise." Then another group of people came to him. Tax collectors came to be baptized and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" He said to them, "Collect no more than you are authorized to do." Then, a third group of people came to him. Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?" He said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false

accusation and be content with your wages." What does the fruit of repentance look like? It's not just right belief. Of course it starts with right belief, but it can't just be head knowledge. It's the way you live your life.

The way John chooses to talk to these people about the way their life has to do with three things. It has to do with their possessions, their money, and their power. If you have two tunics and you only need one, give one away. Remember last week we talked about the rich fool who had everything that he needed in his storehouses and then he had more? Instead of investing that more in the kingdom, instead of helping other people, he just ripped down his storehouses and built bigger ones. God said, "You fool. Your life is going to be required of you tonight. Then what good will those storehouses do?" When you have possessions, when you have more than you need, just like we talked about last week, John the Baptist says you need to give it to the person that has less than they need. Then, the tax collectors, "You've got a job to do. You collect. You have to be fair. You collect what you're supposed to collect and you don't collect extra."

Remember Zacchaeus. He's a tax collector, came down out of the tree. The first thing that he did when he repented of his sins, he says, "I'm paying back everybody more than I took from them, more than the unfair amount that I took from them." That was the first sign of his repentance, was that he recognized that what he had that wasn't his, he had to give back and more. Then, the soldiers, these soldiers had incredible power. This was a occupied country. These soldiers were foreign. They were Roman soldiers and even they want to know from John the Baptist, "What do we have to do to repent?" These Gentiles. He said, "You've got incredible power. Don't misuse it. Be happy with what you get. Be happy with your wages. Be content with it and don't use your power to take money from people." Our possessions, our money, and our power, these are the first places in our everyday life that we are supposed to live generously, not taking what's not ours and sharing the extra that we have. Using our possessions and our money and our power for good to build the kingdom, not to build up ourselves. This is everyday stewardship in a very straightforward way.

What is love then? Well, let's flip over to 1 John. There's very practical everyday stewardship. Let's go a little bit deeper. Let's go a level deeper. 1 John 3:11 to 24 says this, "For this is the message you've heard from the beginning: That we should love one another. We should not be like Cain who is of the evil one and murdered his brother. Why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. Do not be surprised, brother, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love: That he laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide

in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth or in actions and in truth."

Looking at 11 to 18, you know, John starts with, this is the apostle John, not John the Baptist now, the apostle John, "This is the message you've heard from the beginning: Love one another." John's saying this is the core value for Christianity, is to love one another. It's not just the core value. It's the underpinnings, it's the very foundations of righteousness, is to love one another. Look what happened with Cain and Abel. Now, you might say, "I don't get it. Cain brought an offering and Abel brought an offering and Abel's offering was accepted and Cain's wasn't. Why was that?" Well, because Cain didn't give God his best, but here's the thing, but he said he was. That's evil. Lying to God is evil. You get that, right? All right, let me just say it again. Lying to God is evil.

If you are now living a life and you're telling God, "Oh, yeah. God, I'm giving you my best. Oh, yeah. I'm investing in your kingdom," and you're not really doing that, that's evil. That's bad. I don't know any other way to say it. I wish I had longer words to use. Guys, we need to be careful that we're not doing that, that we're not out there trying to act like we're doing something that we're not doing. Are you giving your best with your possessions and your money and your power that you have? Are you using them to the best of your ability to build God's kingdom, to help other people, to love the brothers? Because to not do that is to be Cain. If you're telling God that you're doing that and you're not, it's to be Cain. I don't know if you remember, but the story doesn't end well for Cain. He gets banished after he kills his brother. He's got to live with that for the rest of his life.

Then, John keeps going. He says, "Don't be surprised if the world hates you because this not the value system that the world has. We know we've passed out of death into life. Why? Because we love the brothers." Do you see this? This is interesting. We know that we've passed to death to life because we love the brothers. In other words, the world works on a objective foundation, you know, humanistic foundation like, "I'm going to do what's good for me and typically what's good for me will probably be good enough for everybody else, but I'm going to do what's good for me. It's not good for me to hurt you. It's not good for me to steal from you because I'll get in trouble for that. It's not good for me to lie to you because then you're not going to trust me. I'm going to appear to be very moral," but it's really self-interested moralism.

That's kind of how the world lives. The world lives under self-interested moralism. When somebody comes along and says, "No, no, no. Self-interest should not be the source of your morality, God should be the source of morality." I don't know if you've noticed this, but people get really ticked off when we say stuff like that. They get angry with us. John's just saying don't be surprised. This is exactly what's going to happen. If you're going to live a generous life, you may have people that don't understand it and don't treat you well because of it. Then he goes to the next level. He says, "If you don't love your abiding or sort of living in that death, in that self-interested moralism, and

everyone who hates his brother is a murderer and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him."

John, just like Jesus, raises the bar. If you look at a woman with lust, you've committed adultery. If you hate your brother, you've committed murder. John's repeating this. He's raising the bar for us as brothers in Christ. Hating your brother is like murdering him morally. If we're going to live generously as disciples of Christ, you know, we have to love the brothers. What does that look like? Verse 16. Here's our example, "By this we know love: That he laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers." Now, this is interesting. John is speaking to the church. What he's doing, he's saying, "This is us. We got to be ready to lay down our lives for each other in this room." Here's the thing. If a gunman walked in here with a gun and he started shooting people, the three guys closest to the door would bum rush him. They just would. What would happen?

Speaker 2: Someone get shot.

Brett Clemmer: Say that again.

Speaker 2: Someone get shot.

Brett Clemmer: Someone get shot. Biggest target, dude. Sorry. Someone get shot. A guy's going to come in here with the gun. You're going to get shot. You still going to bum rush the door? Absolutely. Why? Because we'll die for each other. Will we live for each other? Honestly, that's almost easier. It's over in a moment, but what if you see a brother in need and you have to figure out how you can help that brother on a regular basis? What if a brother's coming in here and you know that he's going through some financial problems and you've got some funds to help him out? What if a brother comes in here in emotional distress and week after week after week, his marriage is falling apart or his health is bad or he's got a wayward child and it's just consuming him and that's all he wants to talk about? Are you going to live a generous enough life to every week, week after week, give that man what he needs? That's generous living.

Dying's good. Dying for your brothers is good. Thank you, but dying to yourself, dying for love doesn't necessarily mean physical death. Sometimes it means dying to ownership, dying to possessing, dying to holding on to what God's given me, letting things go and investing that back in the kingdom. That's what love looks like. It's an action. It's not a feeling. It's an action. Verse 16, "By this we know love: That he laid down his life for us and so we ought to do the same thing." The question is: Can you live like this? Now, how do you live like this? Well, in verse 18, he says this, "Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth." In other words, I mean, that's great. You can talk about love, but you need to actually do something about it.

This is interesting, this word here, in deed and in truth. I know you guys love it when we get into the Greek here, but it's the word *aletheia*. It's the word like it's in truth. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." That was the word that he used when he said the truth. "I am the truth." It has this air of not just like factual correctness truth, but like authenticity, like integrity, like it's true like the definition of trueness, like true north is absolutely north. When you're living love, it's like living in the truth. You really love someone when you love them in deed and in truth. It's authentic. That's what we have the ability to do because we follow a God who sent his Son to die for us. We know what authentic love looks like. He lived a perfect life, died for us, and then came back in power and in glory and he's coming back again. We can live generously because of that.

What does this look like in the church? Here's our big generous idea. Love is more than a feeling. It's an intentional and generous way of living. Love is more than a feeling. It's an intentional and generous way of living. This is what love not in word or in talk but in deed and truth is about. It's about being intentional and about being generous. Love is more than a feeling. It's an intentional and generous way of living. What should this look like in the church? David Delk, you may remember David Delk. Do you remember David Delk? David was the president of Man in the Mirror before I was and left a couple years ago, went up to this great church, this church called Grace Church in South Carolina. He's probably watching. Hi, David. They talk about this idea of structuring your life. A disciple structures his life in a way that he can be generous and structures his life in a way that allows him to love other people intentionally.

Nobody that I know of is any better at this than David is. David, for instance, when he and Ruthie moved to South Carolina, they bought a house that had an extra bedroom that was separate enough that they could have missionaries stay there and interns stay there and people that needed a place to stay could stay there. They shaped their lives so that they could do this. When they lived here, their daughter called them one day from college and said, "I've got this friend that I met at school. She's a young woman. She's really struggling with addictions issues and with some personal issues. She needs to get out of this town and she needs a place to go that she can be safe and put her life back together. Can she come live with you?"

Can you imagine that? Your 20-something-year-old daughter calls you up and says, "Hey, there's this young drug addict who needs a place to live. Could they come live with you?" I told my wife that. She's like, "They took her, right? I don't have to." I was thinking the same thing, like, "Oh my goodness. Please." I don't know if there was a second of hesitation, but they, "Absolutely have her come and live with us." They went through. It was a while ago, so I went through this. I experienced it with them, but it was hard. It cost them something to do that. It cost them money to feed her and to help her out. It cost them convenience. It cost them a lot of emotional worry. "Are we going to come home one day and she's cleaned the house out?" David never said that to me, but that would have been my worry. "Is she going to sell our stuff to fuel her addiction?"

To this day, they still have a relationship. They're still invested in this young woman's life because they structured their life to be intentional and generous in the way that they loved the brothers and the sisters. This is what the church should look like. A disciple structures his life so that he can love others. How about you? Who do you know that lives this out? Who's somebody that you know that lives out the generous way of living that is intentional and generous in the way that they love others? Anybody have a story? Here's what we're going to do. I'm going to give you two minutes at the table. Talk about this at the table and then we'll come back and we'll share some stories. Take two minutes at the table, somebody that you know that you've got a good story about the way that they live their life generously.

All right. Got some stories? In Psalms, one of the things that you see is God telling the Psalmist, "Remind your children of the stories. Remind your children of what God's done for you. Remind your children of the stories of the patriarchs." We're going to remind each other of God's goodness with some of these stories. Mike's going to catch it on camera as well. He's got the mic. If you've got a story about a man who lived his life intentionally and generously, raise your hand and we'll come over with the mic right here. You got like 30, 45 seconds. Okay? No sermons.

Speaker 2: Okay, I have a guy that I don't want to say I work with, but anyway, this guy runs a feeding the hungry. It's called Jesus Loves Him and Loves Him Back. I don't know how the guy does it. He was a cocaine addict and God brought him out of it and this is his mission. It's not only here and down on Paramore on Monday night. This guy goes to Jacksonville, Miami, to Georgia, to Texas. I mean, he's all over this place. I don't know how he does it.

Brett Clemmer: Awesome. Thank you.

Speaker 2: I do know how he does it but uh

Brett Clemmer: That's great. All right. Over here.

Speaker 3: Good morning. I thought about my dad this morning. I grew up on a fishing lodge up on the Saint John's River. My parents decided they were going to tear the fishing lodge down and completely rebuild it. It could have been much cheaper for my dad to bring in a bulldozer and just tear down all 12 of those cabins, but he didn't do that. He had a moving company come in and the poor black families that lived on the other end of our town, a lot of them had no place to live and he helped them buy lots and he moved all 12 of those cabins over into that community and gave them away. It was incredible. That has gone on to me because I love to give things away. I'll tell you, gentlemen, nothing will give you a bigger return on investment than being generous and giving up your time and talents.

Brett Clemmer: Excellent. Thank you. Anybody else? Stories of generous living. Over here.

Speaker 4: During World War II, this was told to me by an elder attorney here in Orlando. During World War II, many of the doctors who were under 40 volunteered and went over as medics and so they left their practice. An older doctor here in Orlando took on all their patients. After they got back, most of them returned. He held a banquet downtown. When they got there, he had a check for every one of their patients that he gave back to the doctors.

Brett Clemmer: Wow. That's amazing. That's great. I saw a hand over here. Right here.

Speaker 5: I have a sister who's a retired nurse and she works harder now than she's ever worked in her life. She's formed a foundation that is helping refugees in Atlanta their children get a Christian education, get clothes to go to school and school supplies, backpacks, bike, shoes, everything. Her community, and she lives in the mountains of North Carolina, and in her small community, she's gone to every church there and she can walk down the street and have people say, "Oh, I've got something for the kids." She's working harder now than she ever has.

Brett Clemmer: Awesome. Good stuff. Thank you. Guys, here's the challenge. We'll go to the table time, but here's the challenge. How are you shaping your life so that you can be generous? What are you intentionally doing so that you can live a generous life? Are you living in a way financially that you have excess leftover so that you can figure out how to invest that in God's kingdom? Are you looking at the possessions that you have and when you have something that you don't need or that is more than you need or that someone else needs more than you do, are you looking for ways to help out your neighbor, to help out your brothers and sisters in the church? If you are in a position of power, maybe you own a company or you're an employer or a boss, are you using that power in a way that's generous with the people that work for you? These are the ways that we can live a life of love, a generous life. Love is more than a feeling. It's an intentional and generous way of living. Let's go to our discussion time. We'll take about 15, 20 minutes and then we'll come back and wrap up.

Brett Clemmer: All right, guys. Let's bring it in. You might dress up like a fool and go to a game, right? You might get DIRECTV's Sunday ticket so you can be sure to watch your team or change your spending habits so that you can watch your team. When you love something, you change your life for it. Right? Do you love the brothers? If you love the brothers, you've got to change your life for them. I'm just telling you there's no other way around it. If you're willing to wear spandex or paint your face for a game, if you love your job so much you're willing to spend 60 hours a week at it or 70 hours a week at it, but you got to decide do you love the brothers. Let me draw your attention back to the rest of this passage in 1 John three because here's another thing that generous living does for you as a Christian. Verse 19, "By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him. Whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart and he knows everything." Here's the other thing. Do you ever doubt your salvation?

I do. There's times when things don't feel so great. There's times when things are a little bit dark. There's times when I'm thinking, "Can God really love me? I know me," but one of the things that living a generous life does, according to John, is it brings you reassurance. It reassures your heart that God loves you. Even when your heart is telling you that you're not good enough, even when your heart is telling you that your sin is too great, John says God is bigger than your heart. He's stronger than your heart. He will refocus your heart. Living a generous life, having an intentional and generous way of living out love will reassure your heart and your relationship with Christ. That's a fantastic motivation because, as we live our lives and we live them generously, just the act of doing that, the act of being obedient to what God calls us to do reminds us of our relationship with Christ and how unbreakable the bonds of grace are to your life and to your heart. Let's take a few minutes, go back to our tables. You guys can pray for each other and then we'll be dismissed out of here at 8:00. Thanks, guys. Have a great weekend.