

Living Generously

Session 3: The Boy Who Gave Away His Lunch

Edited Transcript

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We are continuing this morning our series on generous living. This is going to be a wrap up session on generous living. We're talking about The Boy Who Gave Away His Lunch. Some of you probably know who we're talking about. We're going to talk about some heroes of generosity in the Bible and then how that impacts us. Before we do that, let's do our shout out to "Real Amazing Men". This is a brand new group that's meeting at Amazing Grace Fellowship weekly on Wednesdays at 7:00 PM and helping men be real men of God, all ages, all stages. David Gibson and the guys in Twin Falls, Idaho, let's give those guys a hearty welcome. One, two, three, all right.

Well, here we go, generous living. We've been spending the last couple weeks talking about what does it mean to have a generous life, to have a life of generosity. Let me sort of review. The first week we talked about the fact that you can trust God to give you enough to give away everything he wants you to give away. He's always going to provide you with more than you need so that you can take the excess and not build more barns for your stuff, but instead invest that excess into the kingdom. Then, we talked about love and action, that love is more than a feeling. We almost played the Boston song, but we didn't. Love is more than a feeling. It requires action. I had a couple guys offer to sing it. You're welcome for me not letting them.

Then, today we're going to talk about hope and habit. Faith, hope, and love you've probably caught that, but we're talking about when it comes to generosity, you need to figure out that you can trust God, that you've got to put your love and your generosity into action. How do you build a lifestyle, how do you create the habits in your life that enable you to be a generous person, to live a generous life? We're even going to talk a little bit today about why would you even want to do that. Is it just some sort of mindless altruism or is there a deeper purpose to our generosity? Here's our outline today: The Boy Who Gave Away His Lunch. We're going to start talk about your habits and your identity. Then, we'll talk about this concept of are you really robbing God when you're not generous? We'll look at a passage that talks about that in Malachi. Then, we'll talk about four of the heroes. There are many generous heroes in the Bible, but we'll talk about four of them. You're going to do a lot of that at your tables today.

HABITS AND IDENTITY

Let's talk about habits and identity. When somebody says, "Hi, my name's Brett." The next thing that you would usually say to somebody when they introduce themselves is what? What do you do? When you say, "What do you do?" I'm going to probably say, "I work for a Christian nonprofit. I work for a ministry." Yeah. I'll tell you what, if you don't want to talk to somebody on a plane, just tell them you work for a Christian ministry. Those earbuds go in and the magazine comes out. It's awesome. Right, Chris? Yeah. It's great. Now, if you're McCurdy, it doesn't matter if you have headphones in. He's going

to talk louder than anything you could possibly put in those headphones. You're going to come to Jesus by the end of the trip too. For a lot of us, we sort of wrap up who we are in what we do.

There's a lot of times talk about, "You are more than what you do." Actually, you're not. You are what you do. You're not what you think you are. You're not what you like to be. You are what you do. If you don't do something, then that's not who you are. Here's the interesting thing. The more you do something, the more it becomes a part of your identity. Let me give you a weird example. Any of you into exercise? Not too many hands should go up, looking around this room. Some of you are into exercise. Yeah, I watch it on TV every day. I got this example from a guy named Jamie Smith who wrote this great book called *You Are What You Love*. He makes this great analogy. I realize this for me too. If I want to be a runner, I'm not a runner until I do what? How often? A lot, right? I can't just say, "Oh, yeah. I'm a runner. I run to the fridge. I run to the TV. I run to the store." No, no, no. If I want to be a runner, I've got to run. What do I do?

Now, let me tell you, I'm a runner. My identity as a runner has gone up and down. It's sort of in the middle right now, not as high as it used to be, but about four or five years ago, we had a guy in the office who we were interviewing him for a position here. He looked at me and he said, "Are you a runner?" I said, "Yeah. How do you know that?" He's like, "You just look like a runner." Honestly, I was a little thinner than I am right now. When he asked me that, I was in training to run my first half marathon and, by the way, my only half marathon. You say, "Oh, yeah. My first one." Last so far. Hopefully I'll do another one. I was actually running four days a week and had rest days that I did other things, but I had a program. I had a system that I was following so that at the right time, I would actually be able to run 13.1 miles. I was running.

Here's the interesting thing. When I started it, I hated it. I mean, I would go a quarter mile and I would be out of breath. My legs would hurt. You know, it's Florida so it's hot and humid. I just hated it. Then, one day I noticed something. I was a couple months into getting ready for this half marathon and I had a week where I had some early morning ... I always ran in the morning. I had some early morning meetings and I had some things happen and so I missed two days of my training time. I was miserable. I wanted to run. I would go on trips for Man in the Mirror and I would get on my phone before I went and I'd look around the hotel to figure out if it was a place that I could run. Could I chart out a path?

I had become a runner. I had taken on that identity. It exhibited itself in the way that I behaved on business trips, in the mornings. I would get up an hour earlier than I had been getting up for a long time so that I could run and stop sweating in time to go to work. When I didn't get to do that, I was unhappy. I started craving this thing that only a few months before had made me miserable. Why? Because I had developed a habit. I had gotten into the habit of getting out there and running. I had gotten into the habit of exercising. I had gotten into the habit of getting up early in the morning. Even on the mornings that I didn't run, guess what. Woke up at the same time. It was awesome.

Our behaviors, when we do them consistently, literally change who we are. They change our identity when we do them over time. That's why they're called habits. Let me give you another example: smoking. When I was in college, I had some friends that they started smoking. Now, they weren't smokers, but after a couple months of hanging out with buddies and every time they hung out, they'd light up a cigarette, they got to the point where if that time of day came that they were used to pulling out a cigarette and smoking, if they couldn't find a cigarette, they would get antsy. They would get cranky, frankly. Be like, "I'm going to buy you a pack of cigarettes just so you'll be quiet." They became a smoker. Did they want to become a smoker? Not really. It was just a recreational thing that they thought

was fun and kind of cool. That's how a lot of people start habits like that. They don't start it for the purpose of becoming a habitual smoker. They just do it enough that it becomes a part of who they are. Next thing you know, you're a smoker.

You discipline yourself to get up and go running and do it consistently with a goal in mind and, the next thing you know, you're a runner. How you know you've sort of taken on this identity, at least in the way that I'm talking about it, is that when you can't do that thing that you have been doing, you miss it, you crave it, you desire it. What if we could make generosity a habit? What if generosity, what if living generously could be something that we do consistently? Maybe at first it's a task. Maybe at first it's something that you have to be very, very intentional about. What if over time you were living your life in such a way that when you didn't have an opportunity to be generous often enough, you actually started looking around for ways to be generous, you actually started craving? I've got to give this away. I can't hold onto this. I've got too much time on my hands. I've got skills to give away. I've got this money that I've put aside that I want to invest in some kingdom work. I've got to figure it out. What if you could become, your identity could become a man of generosity, a generous man?

Now, let me take a little side road here really quick. The purpose of living generously, the purpose of becoming a generous man is not so that you can like, "I'm a pretty good guy. I'm a generous man, thank you very much." That's not the point at all. The underlying motivation for all of this is what? What Keith said at the beginning. What's the most powerful force in the universe? Love. Love is what motivates us. We want to be generous not so that we can become self-actualized or the best version of ourselves that we've ever been. We want to become generous because we're imitating Christ who did the most generous act that anyone could ever do. We're imitating the Father who made this incredibly generous sacrifice of his own Son for us.

We're motivated in our generosity, not out of some sense of nobility, but out of a sense of worship, out of recognizing that when we say that God's love is more important than our stuff, the outgrowth of that is generosity and the outgrowth of that is identity as a man of God. The result of that is going to be that you're going to be generous. Generosity, I think sometimes we treat generosity like a first thing. I don't think it's a first thing. Loving God is the first thing. Faith in Christ's atoning death and resurrection, that's a first thing. Generosity is five steps down the line. When you really begin to understand your identity as a man of God, it's going to motivate you to want to be a generous man as well because that's what Christ calls us to be.

What happens if you don't foster these habits? Well, we can look at Malachi. If you have a Bible, turn to Malachi chapter three and we can see what it looks like when we don't foster these habits. This is the passage that always comes out when churches do building programs. Right? "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse so that we can build something." I'm not here telling you to help me build anything. You know, it's funny. We were talking in the office about it and one person who shall not be named, but he's behind the camera, said, "You're not going to teach them Malachi passage are you?" If you've been in church too long, when people start talking about generosity, it's like a thinly veiled cloak of give money to the church they think and then everybody goes to Malachi three.

Let's try to put all of that aside. How many of you have heard sermons on generosity? Put all of that aside and let's try to look at this with some fresh eyes because I want to show you something maybe, hopefully a little bit different perspective. Malachi 3:6, "For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed." God loves his people. That's not going to change. Otherwise, he would smite us and we would deserve it. Verse seven, "From the days of your fathers you have turned

aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. But you say, 'How shall we return?'" Look at verse eight, "Will man rob God?"

This is God talking to his people. "Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?' In your tithes and contributions. You are cursed with a curse, for you because of or for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And therefore put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil, and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the Lord of hosts. Then all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight, says the Lord of hosts."

ROBBING GOD?

Here's the interesting thing. If you look at verse eight, God says, "Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me and you say, 'How have we robbed you?'" They didn't even realize it. They didn't understand that they were robbing God. This is what happens when you don't build the habit of generosity. It doesn't even occur to you anymore. I've talked to people about running and they're like, "Really? You run. Why would you do that?" It doesn't even occur to them that somebody would want to do anything faster than apparently a brisk walk to make themselves healthier. It doesn't even occur to them. Why? Because they don't do it. When you don't do something for a long time, you lose the idea that you should even do it. Generosity is something that if you're going to be generous, you're going to build up the practice. You're going to have to be intentional at first.

Here's the thing. There's the thing in business they talk about skills, they talk about unconscious incompetence. That's when you can't do something and you don't even realize it. Then you move to conscious incompetence. That's when you can't do it and you know you can't do it. That's when most people quit, by the way. Then you come to conscious competence. Conscious competence is like me after a couple weeks of running. I'm beginning to get my form good. I've got the right shoes. I know how far I can go. I know how fast I can go, but I have to think about it. I have to think about everything. Then we move to unconscious competence. This is when you have the ability to do something and you don't even have to think about it anymore. It just happens. Have you ever met an unconsciously generous person? I have. I mean, there's guys in this room that are unconsciously generous. They just do it. It's a part of who they are. That's when it becomes a part of your identity, when it's unconscious competence.

The Israelites, they were over here in this unconscious incompetence. They didn't realize they were robbing God. They didn't realize that they weren't doing what they were supposed to do and funding the kingdom and providing the kingdom what it needed to grow and the nation to grow spiritually. Because they didn't realize it, they weren't doing it. God's saying, "In the end, that's robbing me." Now, you can't stop at that verse because then he goes on and says, "Look, I'm not saying this just because I want stuff from you. I'm saying this because I want to bless you. If I bless you now, you won't even realize that you're being blessed because generous people are grateful people." Have you ever noticed that? Generous people are grateful people. Well, they can't be grateful because they're not generous.

He says, "Look, maybe you're scared of being generous. Test me. I'm going to take care of you." This is what we talked about two weeks ago. "You can trust me. I'm going to give you more than you need. How can you learn to trust me, how can you grow your faith if you won't even try, if you won't take the risk?" They didn't even realize. You have to practice generosity. Here's our Big Idea then. **Generous**

living starts with building generous habits. As I was looking at some different passages on generosity for this whole series, I was just struck by how many stories there are of generous people in the Bible, particularly in the New Testament. I just picked out four, and there's more than these, but let's look at these four, these sort of four heroes of generosity. The great thing is these stories, some of these are in all four gospels. They're all in multiple gospels, but they're all in Luke. I'm just going to go through them in the order that they are in Luke.

4 HEROES

In Luke eight, you have the story of the junior leaguers. You guys were supposed to chuckle when I said that, the junior leaguers. Thank you. That was a pity laugh, but okay. Let's go to Luke eight. Look at this, "Soon afterward," verse one, "he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him," listen to this, "and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means." You realize that Jesus's ministry was funded by a bunch of rich ladies, the junior league. Jesus did ministry in these women's lives, which was really radical for its day. I mean, this is Herod's household manager. This is the king's manager and she's taking money out of what she's given and she's funneling it over to Jesus to help underwrite this rabbi's ministry. Just along the way, these women just took of what they had out of their means, out of whatever they had, and they gave that to Jesus and the 12 so that they could go do the ministry.

In Luke nine, you have the boy who gave away his lunch. In the John telling of this story is the place where we find out it was a boy who had five loaves and two fishes. A boy there by himself, I'm guessing a young teenager or a middle school age kid, he brings his lunch. Everybody else forgets theirs. What does he do? Well, I know what I would have done. You know, I would have been hiding it. Nobody else had food. I'm a growing boy. Not this kid. This kid said... It's hot. All the stories tell that. It's hot. They're in a wilderness area, and this kid gives his five loaves and two fishes to the disciples. Then, God takes that and multiplies it incredibly. God does that with the gifts that we give. He multiplies it incredibly.

Luke 10 verse 25 tells the story of the good Samaritan. I mean, the modern-day telling of this would be like going into Israel and saying, "Let me tell you the story of the good Palestinian." I mean, the way that the Jews in Israel feel about the Palestinians would be probably similar to the way that the Jews then felt about the Samaritans. Like, "No. I don't even want to hear a story like that." Yet, that's who Jesus uses to talk about who is my neighbor. Then, Luke 21 is the story of the widow's mite. You guys remember this story in verse one. "Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. And he said, 'Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.'" Giving out of her means.

It's interesting that if you look at these four stories, and these are pretty representative of the kinds of stories that Jesus would tell. You know, the widow, the junior leaguers, and the boy, these are all real people. The good Samaritan is a parable, but notice it's not like the Baptist was very generous, the man who grew up in church. It's all these people that are sort of from the fringes. Jesus uses that example I think to sort of get our attention and get the people's attention in this day. It's like you can learn to be generous from people that you would not expect to be generous. If I just tell you that Warren Buffet is generous, you'd be like, "Of course Warren Buffet's generous. He's got like a bajillion dollars. Big deal." When you hear stories about a widow giving the little bit that she has, about a boy sharing his lunch that

nobody else remembered, it hits something in our hearts, hopefully, that makes us sit up and pay attention and makes us realize that those actions by those people were not in a vacuum. It wasn't like one day they just decided to be generous. I'm telling you that these people built up habits over time so that when the time came for them to make another generous contribution, to do another act of generosity, that was part of who they were. It was part of their identity. They were ready to act.

Guys, if we're going to be ready to act generously, if we're going to be ready to step into a person's life that needs our time, if we're going to be ready to make a substantial investment in a project that is going to build God's kingdom, if we're going to be ready to bring our talents and skills to bear, maybe helping an organization that needs your expertise or helping a widow put a hot water heater in her garage and you know how to do it and you're way cheaper than a plumber, whatever those things are, your time, your talent, your treasure, when the need comes, the more used to being generous you are, the less of an imposition it's going to feel like and the more it's going to feel like, "Yeah, I want to do this. I want to help. This is who I am." You don't get there just by snapping your fingers. It takes a lifestyle. The way you build up the lifestyle is at first you just have to be intentional. You just have to do it out of a little bit of willpower.

You know, here's what happens. We like to say at Man in the Mirror, we like to say this. Belief determines behavior. I don't want to discount that. Belief determines behavior ultimately, but you can believe something and not do anything about it. You could say, "They don't really believe it." I don't want to get into semantics, but I know a lot of guys that believe the right things, but I don't see the fruit in their lives. There's some connection between belief and behavior. There's something in the middle. Pascal called it the will. "The will is the mind choosing," he said. What is will? Your will is your decision to take action. You don't just get to go, "I believe in the Bible. I know lots of Bible verses so my life's going to be the right kind of life." No, it doesn't work like that. You have to be deliberate. We have to decide that we're not just going to know the Bible, but we're actually going to live it out.

There's a lot of, I love this phrase Pat uses, spiritually obese people. We know Bible verses and we go to church and we do our small group thing. We come to our Friday morning men's thing. We check the boxes and we're like, "Got that Christian thing under control." If you're not impacting other people's lives around you, if you're not giving away the excess that God has given you for the exact purpose of you giving it away, you are spiritually obese. I mean, are you saved? I'm sure you are, but you're going to have a shack in heaven. I don't know about you, but I'd rather have treasure in heaven. I want a big, big house. The Bible's very clear that the way we live our lives now follows us into eternity. Let's be generous men. Let's build a generous life by intentionally building some generous habits into our lives.

Let's take some time at our tables. Let me pray for you and then we'll take some time at our tables to talk about this. Then, we'll get back together in about 20 minutes. Lord, these things are not easy to nail down. We never, Lord, want to put our behavior above your action. We never want to put the things that we do and say that they're more important than the ultimate thing that you did, Lord. We live the life that we live out of a response to the love that you have for us, out of a response, Jesus, to your death and resurrection. Lord, will you help that to be the motivating factor and the way that we build our lives, the way that we intentionally build habits of generosity into our lives, Lord? We put that in front of you in Jesus's name. Amen.