



Christmas 2019-Part 3

Christmas Generosity

Pastor Mike Fabarez

Well, here is the statistic for you. Are you ready? The Bible, compared to any other book, is reported to be shoplifted more than any other. That's right. More people shoplift the Bible, steal it, than any other book. Now, that's a weird statistic. You heard it right and there's plenty of things wrong with that statistic. I mean, here's a book about honesty and certainly speaks of not stealing and it's stolen more often than any other book. I know you're saying do those crooks ever read what's in this book they just stole? Well, I hope so. I know we don't like things like that either, because who likes to see the glaring contradiction of someone and their Bible not doing what it says and acquiring it by theft. I mean, this is not a good thing. We don't like to hear about that hypocrisy when it comes to people and their Bibles.

But I just wonder, for those of us that do read our Bibles, I wonder if anyone sees glaring contradictions in our lives. I'm not speaking about the basics like being honest and not shoplifting. I trust you haven't been shoplifting this week. I'm talking more about the overwhelming and repeated call of the Scripture that you and I would be loving and generous people. I mean, clearly the Bible says that. Right? It's hard to read the New Testament without that real big emphasis on the fact that Christians ought to have, number one, a different relationship with their material possessions than other people have. But certainly that we should be the people who love other people and that we genuinely sacrifice and give generously to other people. I mean, that's the message of the New Testament. I just wonder if people look at us and say, yeah, there's someone in my life who is the most caring and generous person in the office, the most caring and generous person in the neighborhood, the most caring and generous person in my extended family. Do they look at you and see that?

I know that's a challenging thought but I think this Christmas, more than any other time of year, we ought to stop and think how appropriate that is for us to have that reputation and to seek to live up to that reputation. Because at Christmas, what we see in the Bible is God's act of caring and giving. Right? You know, the first verse you learned, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son." That act of caring and giving generously is the pattern of Scripture, and it is really distilled in the incarnation of Christ. We had a need. God sees that need. He sends his Son to meet that need. And that is an act of extreme generosity.

I want to turn you this morning in our thoughts to studying Scripture to a nontraditional Christmas passage, but one that I hope you'll see is apropos, it really does hit the nail on the head when it comes to what Christmas is about and the challenge that we ought to have as being the caring, loving, generous and giving people that God calls us to. So take your Bibles, if you haven't already, and turn to Second Corinthians Chapter 9. Second Corinthians Chapter 9. If you know your Bible well, you immediately know, OK, Second Corinthians Chapter 9, that's the end of this little two chapter excurses that Paul has in talking about generosity. And he does. There's a historical reason for it because there are things going on in Jerusalem in the church that was causing great consternation and poverty among the Christians there. Paul is calling on the



Corinthians, who I like to say it's the Orange County of the ancient world. They're above average in terms of their income and their wealth and their prosperity. I mean, it may not be, you know, I don't know, it may not be the French Riviera, but it's a place where people are doing better than most people. Paul says, listen, you guys ought to think about contributing to the needs of these saints, these Christians, in Jerusalem. He talks about the Macedonians, another group of Christians, and says, look at how they've given and now you who live in the region of Acadia, in northern Greece now we might say, you need to be engaged in this. And why don't you express your love for the people of God by a real generous contribution here?

That's what's going on, and I'm really just jumping in, and I'll apologize ahead of time, to the end of this conversation. It'll almost be like when I start to read these three last verses of Chapter 9, like we've just jumped into the middle of a phone conversation. We want to hear the rest. Well, I'll fill in the historical part of this, but I want you to see that this is all about the concern that the real love of the Corinthians would be expressed by the way that they're willing to sacrifice and give to those in need around them.

While the first two verses might be a bit like, wow, yeah, there's a lot going on here, obviously. The last verse, I trust, will be crystal clear. It could stand on its own. It could be on a Christmas card and perhaps it was emblazoned on yours. But let's read these three verses. I'll read from the English Standard Version starting in verse 13, Second Corinthians Chapter 9, beginning in verse 13 and it reads like this. "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. While they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you."

A lot of pronouns, we got to figure out what are the antecedents. Where do they go? Who is "they"? Who's "them"? Who is "you"? I mean, we'll get into all of that. But verse 15 can stand on its own. Right? You could be walking down the street and hear this sentence and go, "Okay, I get it." And here's what he says and you've heard it before, verse 15, "Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!" Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift! Like so often in Scripture, when God is asking us to consider how we love and how we give, God says you need to look at the ultimate example, and that is God loving us and giving his Son. And from Christ's perspective, Christ giving of himself to meet our need because he cares for us. That's the gold standard and it starts there.

So, allow me to start at the bottom of this passage this Christmas season to say, well, let us start there, because we're celebrating with lights and family gatherings and Christmas carols, the coming of Christ to the world. If you want to distill it down into something very basic, we could say this is God's gift to you. That's the ultimate gift, the inexpressible gift and we ought to be thankful for it at Christmas. Before we ever talk about our love for other people, let's talk about his love for us. So let's start at the bottom of the passage, which really is the foundation of everything for the last two chapters in Second Corinthians. Let's just think about how grateful we should be. If you're here, sit here as a Christian and you know that your sins are forgiven, not because you're better than the people on the news feed, but because you know that you have the



gift of Christ's righteousness applied to you, I want you to stand back and say, wow, I've been given a lot.

Number one, if you're taking notes and I wish that you would, jot this down. You and I need to "Reconsider What You Have Been Given." And when it comes to Christians sitting here today, I'm not talking about your cars, your clothes, your food, your house. I'm talking about the fact that right now, if you were to pass from this life into the next, you will not be condemned. You will be accepted. If you want to think about that with some honesty in your heart, you'll recognize this: I do not deserve to be accepted because God set down a standard of rules, a standard of virtue, a standard of what is ethical and right and moral and righteous, and you and I didn't live up to that. God looks at us as falling short of that standard. He said, you have messed up and I'm going to solve the problem by sending my Son to live the way human beings should have lived, and then I'm going to take all of your guilt and all of your transgression and all of your compromise and all of your iniquity and wickedness and all the evil of your heart, and I'm going to place that on Christ. The Father is not going to treat the Son as though he were you, so that your sin could be expedited, expunged. You could have your sins atoned for. So that God could look at you as though you were as righteous as Christ, because he looked at his Son as though he were as guilty as you.

Through the great exchange of faith, a gift, it is not by works, it's a gift of God, no one can boast about it, you've been saved by grace through faith. It's a gift of God, it's not of yourself that no one should boast. Christmas, if it means nothing else, means that. It means that you and I can no way live up to the standard that would make us acceptable for all of God's blessings. But you're going to get them one day if you are a Christian, because you're trusting in the finished, completed, full payment work of Christ on your behalf. I just hope you're trusting in that this morning. I hope that you realize that you're willing to exchange your old life for a new life of following Christ and saying, I trust him. If you trust him that's the biggest gift of all. It is, look at that word, an inexpressible gift.

That's how the English Standard Version translates it, and depending on your translation, you may have several choices there because it's the only time, and, of course, the New Testament was written in Greek, it's the only time this Greek word ever shows up in the Greek New Testament. Inexpressible. Some translations use "indescribable." You can see even with those two choices of an English translation, it's negated. Right? And it is a negated Greek word and if you say, well, that's the only time it used. Is it used without the negation? I'm glad you asked. Yes, it is. A couple of times and I want you to jot down one of them, Acts Chapter 15. I want you to jot down Acts Chapter 15 verse 3. In Acts Chapter 15 verse 3, the second half of this Greek word is used without the negation in front of it. Like the word inexpressible. You could say, well, the word expressible. Is that ever use? Well, of course. Well, in this case, you have the Greek word, and it's translated with three English words in most English translations, and certainly in the English Standard Version, it's translated this way in Acts 15 verse 3. Ready?

Paul and Barnabas come back from their missionary journeys and they go and they, here are the three words, they explain in detail, they "describe in detail." They lay out in detail the things that have happened among the Gentiles. They lay it out. English Standard Version. "Describe in detail."



This text now uses that word, only used a couple of times in the New Testament, only used once with a negation. It's now you can't describe it in detail. The gift of God is so extravagant, it's so amazing, it's so fundamentally mind-blowing that you could not fully describe it in detail.

Now, if you think about the way that's put, I'm hoping that leads you, some of you at least if you know your Bible, to a way that Paul put it to the Ephesians as he talked about how amazing it is that God would love us. And I want you to turn to that passage, Ephesians Chapter 3. I want you to look at the way that Paul puts it here, because this is the kind of thing that should push your mind to recognize that if you think you understand what kind of gift you received, you haven't fully comprehended it. It is indescribable, it is inexpressible. It is beyond explaining in detail. It all starts with the fact that God would ever love you and God would ever love me. I know we like to think of him as a just kind of gingerly, grandfatherly figure. He's on a rocking chair. He's got a refrigerator and your picture's on it and he just loves you because you're cute and you're not all that bad. And boys will be boys. That's not how God views you. God is a holy God. Angels are flying around, crying out, "holy, holy, holy." He's a perfectly moral and righteous God and with you, there should be no fellowship. There should be no acceptance.

And yet he, with the great love with which he loved us, was willing to look at his moral rebels, the creations that he's created, that every one of us in this room have chosen NOT to do what he says, like Eve in the Garden, "I don't care what the rule is. I want to do what I want to do." And every one of us has recapitulated that very same transgression in one way or another. And let's just say it, in thousands and if not millions of ways in our lives.

God says I'm going to love them so much that I will sacrifice not Judas, not Satan, not Nebuchadnezzar, not Balaam, not Ashurbanipal, not some bad person of the Bible, I'm going to sacrifice my own Son who I love. I will show you the extent of my love that is so extreme and vast that you could never fully comprehend it. Well, Paul's praying for them in the bottom of Ephesians Chapter 3, he says, I hope that you guys can start to comprehend the incomprehensible. I hope that you can express something of the gratitude for something that is inexpressible. He puts it this way. Drop down to verse 14 if you want to skim through the context. "For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father," Ephesians 3:14, "from which every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory, that he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his spirit in the inner person." God wants you to be strengthened. Why? "So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." Now, here's the purpose clause. I want God to be active in your life, I want "Christ to dwell in your hearts through faith -- that you, being rooted and grounded in love." Well, that's what God is known as. Right? God is love. God is a loving God. He cares for the interest of those who have a need and he reaches out to me.

So, I want you to be like that. Well, the gold standard needs to be the basis for it all and here comes the gold standard. God's love, "we may have strength," verse 18, "to comprehend," not just with the preachers, the professors or the missionaries or the Bible translators, that we can "comprehend with all the saints," everyone should seek to comprehend this. What? "What is the breadth, what is the length, what is the height, what is the depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge." Is that a weird, oxymoronic statement? It wants you to start to



understand something you could not possibly fully understand. I want you to seek to try and know something that just is unknowable. I want you to be able to try to scrutinize the thing that is inscrutable. I want you to try to express gratitude for something that is just an inexpressible gift. It's an amazing, mind-blowing thing that God would love you. If you're not at that point yet, you don't understand the problem. The problem of sin is so vast, it is so bad, it is so serious. It's not like you have the moral sniffles, you understand. It's not a sickness. The Bible says you are dead in your transgressions and sins. But God, while you were dead, while you were a rebel, he demonstrates his love for you in this that while you're yet a sinner, you're still a rebel, Christ, his own Son, dies for you.

If you were my enemy and I said I'm willing to kill my son so that you would be forgiven from a penalty you justly deserve, you'd think, man, Mike is the most loving person in the world. I mean, how often, and we do see it in the Bible, someone willing to give up their child because they love God.

You see that, right? You see Hannah, for instance, coming with little Samuel. After she weans him, she dropped him off with a guy who's not much of a good caretaker, Eli, the priest and leaves him there and walks away. Can you imagine the tears of Hannah walking away from her little son, Samuel? You think she loves God so much she's willing to give up her own son.

Yeah, well, it's even more poignant if you go back to the biggest head-scratching passage in the book of Genesis where Abraham is called to go up this mountain, Mount Moriah, that will become the Temple Mount one day and take your son, your only son, the son that you love and there offer him as a burnt offering. Can you imagine? Go burn your son. Go take a knife and like you would with an animal, I want you to sacrifice him on that mountain. And here is Abraham, dutifully taking his son, binding him and putting him on an altar and taking a knife, willing to slay his own son. And you think that guy has got a crazy love for God? Well, that's true. But you've got a sinful person sacrificing his sinful son for a holy God. And you want to start to imagine what it's like to give up your own son out of love for someone. That's an amazing picture. But flip it around, because that's not how it works with God. God is the holy one. God is the perfect one. God has a perfect and holy Son. And he looks at sinful people and he's willing to give up his own Son for sinful people so that you and I can face death one day and march across the threshold into the presence of our creator and be accepted when we don't deserve to be accepted.

That is an inexpressible, mind-blowing gift. God has given it to those of you this morning who sit here repentant of your sinful life and trusting fully in Christ's finished work. That is a gift you've received, fully qualified to inherit the kingdom right now. If we all died because a meteor came and splashed us all into smithereens, all of us who are trusting in Christ go directly into the presence of God, and he would say, "Enter into the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." You don't deserve it and I don't deserve it. It is mind-boggling. "The breadth and the length and the height and the depth of that love and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge."

The text here is saying you ought to be thankful for the thing you can't even fully thank God for. You need to understand something that is incomprehensible. You're going to have time to fixate

on that. Matter of fact, as long as you're in Ephesians, go back to Ephesians Chapter 1 real quick. He prays for them starting in verse 3 in Ephesians 1, and he says, listen, you have so many blessings from God. And the ones that matter most are not what you have in your closet or your garage or what your real estate is worth. It's about the fact that you have been blessed, not on this earth, but you've been blessed in all the spiritual realms. God has said to you your account is free from sin. Look at it in verse 3. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ," not because of you, because of Christ, "with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places." Wait till you get there. The blessings that you and I will receive. It's going to be my... "Eyes have not seen, minds have not conceived the good things that God has planned for those that love him." You are going to have all those because of Christ, and "He's chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be..." two things we're not, "holy and blameless." Oh, he's going to count us that way. "Before him. In love he predestined us," verse 5, "for adoption to himself as sons," as though we're inheriting a kingdom. How can we be sons? Well, he did it. We're adopted. We're not naturally born. We're not morally born. We're not ethically born his sons. We are born his sons by adoption. We don't deserve it. "Through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will." He planned it.

Here is the purpose and this will be what you fixate on for eternity. It's not a boring hymn-sing for eternity. This is not something you're going to get tired of doing. You're going to do this "to the praise of his" mind-boggling, mind-blowing, "his glorious grace." A gift. That's what grace is. To the praise of his glorious gift, his grace. "With which he has blessed us," because he loves us so much. Well, no, because he loves his Son, and he loves us "in the beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace." What kind did we get? Did we get a thimble of it? Did we get a cup full of it? Did we get a trunk full of it? No, verse 8, "He lavished it upon us." He lavished it upon us. It is the breadth, the height, the length, the depth, it is mind-boggling how much God would love you to send his Son so that you would not suffer, so that you would not pay the penalty of your sin. You would not be cast out of his presence. "He lavished it upon us, in all wisdom and insight." He had his eyes open, he knew every sin you'd ever commit. He knows just exactly how bad you are. He knows how bad your motives are, how rotten and duplicitous you've been, how hypocritical you've been. He knows all of that.

But with his plan of "wisdom and insight, he's made known to us" the mind-boggling mystery of his will. "The mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he..." Do you want a Christmas phrase? Here it is. "Which he set forth in Christ." He put all that down and said, Christ is going to come and he's going to fulfill all righteousness. He's going to live in your place. He's going to die in your place. "A plan," verse 10, "for the fullness of time." And though we started the end times here with the coming of Christ, it's not going to be done until he comes again when he's going "to unite all things," bottom of verse 10, "in him, things in heaven and on earth," and everything's going to be copacetic. Everything's going to be just the way it ought to be. And he's going to resolve everything exactly as he wants it, as he brings his adopted children because of the great gift of Christ into his presence, lavishing upon them for all eternity, the great gift of his goodness. He's going to say, you are called to the purpose and the point and the praise of the grace of God, the great grace, verse 6, "to the praise of his glorious grace."

Is all the other stuff true that the world's going to try to focus on for the next week? Yeah, it's true. It's great. He gave you the car. He gave you the house. He gave you your health, whatever, however good that is, he's giving you all that stuff. You got food in the pantry, you got clothes in the closet. Yeah. He gave you all that and I'm not trying to minimize the fact that that's not a gift from God. It is a gracious gift of God and none of us deserve it. And as he said to those in the settlement, as they're about to go into the Promised Land, "Listen, don't think it's your strength or your smarts that accomplishes this for you. You wouldn't have strength or smarts if God didn't give that to you. He said to the Corinthians, the Orange County of the first-century world, he says this, "What do you have that you have not received?" You've been given it all. It's grace. You think you're better than the next person to have more in your bank account because you're smarter than the next person. Guess where you got the brain cells? Guess where you got the discipline? Guess where you got the stick-to-itiveness? Guess where you got the education? All of that comes as a gift of God. You've received that from God. You ought to be grateful for the gifts of God. But I'm talking here about the foundational gift, the inexpressible gift of the grace of God given to you in Christ. Do you want to be more like Christ this Christmas? I would like you to be. I'd like to be. It starts with us thinking about and pondering and reconsidering what we've been given, the gold standard, "Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift."

Back to our passage. As he ends with that, he's just come off of talking about things that they've been doing. What have they been doing? Well, they've been generous and he's praising them for that. He's calling them to generosity. But I want to look at verse 13 and recognize what that feels like, what that's like. Look at the words used here. "By their approval of this service." Their approval. Who? Well, the people who are watching it. The people who are receiving it. Right? The Macedonians are looking on to see what the Acadians are going to give. Right? The Jerusalem Christians are going to receive it, and look at how the Corinthians, the Orange County first-century Christians, how they were giving. They were going to look at that. "And 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 the others" that you give to.

But the word I want to look at here is the word "service." That's an interesting word. If you grew up in a traditional church, you probably had a group of people in your church you called the deacons. Am I right? Smile at me if you know what a deacon is. Right? A deacon is someone in the church who has some position, and depending on the church, if they're thinking biblically, these are the key ministry leaders. Matter of fact, that's what we call them here, because deacon is a transliterated Greek word from the Greek New Testament. And that means it's not translated, it's just thrown into English. Diakonos becomes the word deacon. We say deacon, and everyone goes what does that mean? Explain it to me.

Well, if you want to explain it to someone, you might as well translate it. And to translate it, it means someone who serves, a servant. Someone who is giving service, someone who is doing ministry, someone who's trying to do things that actually causes sweat to come off their brow. In this passage, he describes their generous contribution as service. If you want a bigger phrase looked back up at verse 12. He uses the word again here, but he adds another word to it. He says



the "ministry of this service, not only supplying the needs of the saints," Christians are having their needs met, "but it's also overflowing with many thanksgivings to God." So service.

There's something about giving that some people think is going to be like easy to do. Matter of fact, when Jesus said it's more blessed to give than to receive. You think, OK, I'm going to try to get into this giving thing. I'm going to try to be generous and I'm going to give an amount or I'm going to give in a way that makes me feel good, like I feel good about giving that gift. Stop with that. Here's the thing. Real giving is the kind of giving that in some small way is going to feel a little bit like Christ putting down his knees and his head on a rock in the Garden of Gethsemane and saying, "Let this cup pass from me." That's how hard it was for him to give of himself. He gave of himself in a way that hurt. It was a service to God and a service to God that was painful. It was difficult.

Do you still got Ephesians warmed up? As long as we're talking about Ephesians, I want you to go to Ephesians real quick, Chapter 5. In Ephesians Chapter 5, the picture of my giving needs to reflect the giving of Christ. That's what I want to focus on. I want to think about what that feels like to serve in a way that sacrifices because I love. Look at verse 1. Are you there? Ephesians 5:1. Do you want a summary of the Christian life? Here's what it looks like. Christians, by the way, that was a word of disparagement. It was a pejorative term for Christians in the first century. It was only used three times in the New Testament and they said it like, "Oh, you're a little Christ." That's what Christian means, "little Christ." We now wear it is a badge of honor. Right? You want to be like Christ. I'd like to be a little Christ in Orange County. I'd like to live like Christ. I'd like to represent Christ by reflecting his character.

Well, you want a good summary of the Christian life? Here it is, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children." Your love, you need to imitate God's love. You need to be like that. And he says this, verse 2, "Yeah, walk in love." Live in love. That word, "walk." Make sure in every manner of your life they see love, "as Christ loved us." How did he love us? By doing things that felt good for him? No. "He gave himself up for us, as a fragrant offering." What does that mean? God accepted and said, "Man, this smells good. This is good. I accept this sacrifice." Oh, but there is the word. It is a sacrifice. "Walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." We can move it from the word "service," which is hard because guess who's tired after serving all those tables in Acts 6. Man, as Stephen puts his feet up after being a deacon all day, he goes, "Wow, that was hard." He gave up the freedom that he had to do other things and be comfortable and he sat there tired. And Christ, we ramp up the word to a word "sacrifice," sacrificed. It was tough.

You're going to have to push yourself beyond your comfort zone if you want to love the way God loved, even just to get a taste of what it means to love and to be generous. It's going to be more than just doing what feels comfortable. You're going to have to push yourself out of your comfort zone to start to reflect the love of Christ in real sacrificially, generous ways. It's going to feel like service and service isn't easy.

Number two, let's jot it down that way. You need to "Push Yourself to Give Generously." That's the idea of the word diakonos, to push yourself, to move beyond what is comfortable. Jesus said



something interesting when he talked about giving, didn't he? You might remember this phrase. Jesus talking about the Pharisees and the Pharisees were only concerned about their reputation and they were giving in a way where everyone could say, oh, you're really generous. So they would blow the trumpets and they make sure everyone knew exactly how much they gave.

Then Jesus said some things about it, like to stop with all that ostentatious giving, just don't do it that way. But then he added this interesting phrase, which I think goes beyond just being ostentatious and worrying about your reputation. He gets down to the real battle involved in giving the way Christ asked us to. He said this. "Don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing." Now, that's a weird statement. Think about it. You got a right hand and a left hand and the right hand is going to give, and the left hand, don't tell the left hand with the right hand did. That's an interesting way to put it. The picture, obviously, is this: that I'm going to give with the right hand. Well, what am I doing here, implied with the left hand? Well, I'm gaining things with the left hand, I gather with the left hand, but then the right hand is taking and giving away. And guess what the left hand that gathers thinks about the right hand that's giving? Stop doing that. Right? I want all that stuff. I'm collecting all this stuff so that I can have stuff, and to put it in James 4 terms, "spend it on my pleasures." But here's what Jesus said, when you're giving, you could have an internal battle. Your right hand could be fighting your left hand as you go out with your right hand to give, your left hand is going, "whoa, whoa, whoa, wait a minute. I got that for us."

And so here's a picture of you not counting the cost and saying, well, I'm not going to worry about the collecting and the gaining, I'm going to focus on the giving. I'm going to know this: there's always going to be a built-in internal struggle and my flesh is going to grate against generosity. You need to know that. Generosity is not going to feel good. You're going to have part of you that's not going to feel good.

There could be someone in your small group, their car broke down, they don't have money for a car. You're sitting there, you've got three cars to your name and you say, "Well, I was always planning on selling that third car, I could probably get 10 grand out of that car. I mean, it's in good shape. I've checked it out on Kelley Blue Book and I could put it on the Auto Trader and I can get rid of it. And here you are thinking, "Wow, this person could really use this car. I know he doesn't have 10 grand to buy this car."

But for you to go home and take the pink slip out and sign it over to someone in your small group and to say, "Hey, I know you need this car. I'm going to give it to you." Oh, it's easy when it says, hey, if someone has no cloak and you have two cloaks, give them one. Yeah, well, that's easy. You need to borrow my jacket. No, no, no, no. Think about that in terms of something like a 10 grand sale. Guess what I do when I have an asset that I know I could sell for 10 grand. I'm already spending that 10 grand somehow. My left hand that wants to gather it, I should say don't tell the left hand because the right hand is going to give it away. And you know what that means? That means internal struggle and difficulty. That means being generous to someone in my life, that the other part of my life could continually calculate the cost of how much I'm losing in this deal.



Jesus struggled in the Garden, going to the cross. It was going to cost him, but he was willing to say, "Not my will, but yours be done." This cup is going to be a really distasteful cup to drink, the dregs in this cup, I don't want. I can think about all of that pain or I can think about pleasing God by giving my life as a fragrant offering and sacrifice. I'm going to do the sacrifice because I want it to please God. And nothing pleases God more than what we just read being imitators of God. We are so loved. Can you love other people and love them with your stuff? Push yourself to love them with the things that you own.

John 3:16, I started with that. "For God so loved the world that he gave..." Now, I know the numbers and the verses came centuries later, but it is poetic that FIRST John 3:16 nicely reflects John 3:16, John the gospel 3:16, "God loved and gave his Son." First John 3:16 says, you know what? Just as Christ laid down his life for us, so "you ought to lay down your life for your brothers." He gave -- you need to give. Then verse 17 says this, "If you have the world's goods and you see your brother in need and you close your heart up against him, how can the love of God be in you?" Don't tell me you really love God and that God loves you and you haven't learned from the gold standard of the inexpressible gift of God's grace to you, and now you're called upon to show that grace toward your brother, and you're not willing to open up your hand toward his need.

You got to push yourself to give generously. And by the way, if you think it's just about money, I love the fact that the word, "diakonia" is the word actually used here. Diakonos is one form of it that we transliterate into deacon. Diakonia in this passage, I like that it's used to describe giving because it certainly moves being beyond giving because I immediately think of Acts 6 and serving tables. Listen, love people with your stuff. But there's a lot more than your stuff that your left hand is collecting. Your energy, your talent, your peace of mind, your vacation time, another night out to sit in front of your TV or your computer screen. I can grab all those things, but my other hand needs to be giving that away. I need to love people. As I say around here, I need to be willing to go the extra mile. That's going to cost me a lot of energy. I need to be willing to spend the extra dollar. OK, that's what we've been talking about. Stuff leaves my wallet, my bank account. I need to be willing to stay the extra hour.

Trust me, there are things I want to do with my hours. Right? There are things you want to do with your hours. But you could love people. You could love people by being a leader in our Awana program and investing in kid's lives, changing the trajectory of their lives and you could say, wait a minute, I'm going to give up my Thursday night? I want to be at home. And then we can have so many people involved in the program that we say we really need to do this two nights a week. Now all of a sudden we got to double our volunteers and now we're looking at more people saying, hey, what are we going to do? I'm just saying this: do you understand how every time we deal with something that's going to cost us our time or our talent or our treasure, every single time, if we're going to make that happen, people need to be willing to fight the good fight within their own hearts to say I'm going to push myself outside of my comfort zone. I'm willing to lovingly, because I care about people, go the extra mile, stay the extra hour and spend the extra dollar. You got to push yourself to do that. It's never going to happen unless you care about the end product.



There's a great, great, christological section of Philippians that speaks of Christ not being willing to hang on to that thought of being God. Right? In other words, he did not regard "equality with God a thing to be grasped, but he emptied himself." That great Greek word "Kenosis," he let go. He was willing to say, I got all this privilege and comfort. I'm going to let it go. Then he was being willing to be found in the "form of a bond servant." You know that passage. Do you know that that passage was given in the context of Paul being concerned that in the church they care about each other? That was the whole point. Oh, it's one of the highest and loftiest, christological passages in the New Testament. But Paul enlisted it as an example, as the gold standard, of the way you should care for other people.

And you know how it started? Here's how he sets it up. He says, "You should not just look out for your own interests. You ought to look out for the interests of others." Now, some of you say, "Oh, I know all that." Do you remember what happens in the second half of Philippians 2? You have Paul concerned that people look out for other people's interests. Then he says, listen, Christ is the ultimate. Look how he set aside the comforts of his life to reach out and meet the needs sacrificially and generously for people. He said, be like that, "Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

But in the second half of the passage, he starts talking about his buddies, his co-workers, his fellow pastors, and he starts to talk about one of his young pastors. His name was Timothy. He would leave in Ephesus eventually to be the senior preaching pastor there. And he says, you know what? I'm traveling here with Timothy. I'm going to send Timothy to you. Let me read this passage to you. He says, I can't wait to send him. I can't e-mail, I can't text you, I can't call you, I'm going to have to send a courier, but I'm going to send the best I have. And here's what he says: "I have no one else like Timothy, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare," and then he contrasted, "for everyone else seeks their own interests."

He's comparing the fact that the very thing he's trying to teach the Philippians is, you know what, you don't find most people caring about other people's interests in a very sincere way that leads them to sacrifice. I'm about to put Timothy on a long and painful, scary and even dangerous journey to visit you and come back to me with news as to how you're doing. I'm going to send him to you because I know that he really cares about your interest. "He is a genuine concern for how you're doing."

Every morning you get up and care about your teeth. You care about your hair. You care about scrubbing your armpits. You care about putting on your shoes. You care about presenting yourself. And all I'm saying is loving yourself is the default way that we care for our own interest. And the Bible says, listen, the basics of Christianity, you want to talk about the basics of Christianity, I ought to "love my neighbor as myself." I ought to be able to look out for your interest the way I would look out for mine. If I have a need like a car, I'm going to spend money to drive a car. And I'm just saying, I need to learn to start loving and caring for people like that and they're not me.

Timothy was like that. I hope you want to live up to that example. I mean, to think about Paul saying we really need to care for each other. We ought to put other people's interests before our



own and then think, oh, Christ was the ultimate example. Paul says, I got a guy for you. He's doing it. And that's all I'm trying to say at the outset of this message. Do the people in your office say there's the Timothy? He really cares. And if it demands in your life that he stay an extra hour, he's going to do it because he loves people. Timothy, if there is a need and there's an extra dollar that needs to be spent, he will do it because he has a genuine concern for your welfare. In your neighborhood, do they see you that way? If something needs to be done and you're going to express care and love and concern, they know you're going to be there. Not just with money. With everything you are. You need to push yourself to give generously and I mean more than your wallet. That's the reflection of the greatness of God.

One more thing. When I talk about the greatness of Jesus saying it's better to give than to receive, it's more blessed to give than to receive. I just want to tell you right here in these two verses, verses 13 and 14, printed there on your worksheet. Look at it again. You've got at least five things. Let me point out five quick things that are the good that comes from giving. The good that comes from giving. Let's go through these very simple things. Matter of fact, I've distilled them down and truncated them down to two words. So, yeah, I got five sub-points here. But I want you to think, number three, about the good of giving. Jot that down. "Know the Good of Giving." What comes from giving when I'm actually learning to sacrifice out of my comfort zone to care for people and lavish things upon them. It doesn't matter if they deserve it. I'm going to love them there with Christ's love. I'm going to sacrifice the way Christ sacrificed. I'm going to do the best I can to push myself to meet needs because I really care about people. What's the good that comes from that? There are several things in this passage.

Let's start with the simple ones. Verse 14, "While they long for you and pray for you." Let's start at the end. "Pray for you." I hate to say it, but that's the way we're wired. If you are super generous to me, guess what happens? I don't need to put you on my prayer list. You're on my prayer list. I start praying more. "Multiplied Prayers." I don't know how you want to put it. Added prayers. That's the first one. You see people praying. If you have a small group of people who are really genuinely giving to each other, if you have people who show that they'll put your needs before their own, you're going to say, I'm going to pray for them. The network of prayer and mutual concern is going to go through the roof when you have giving, generous people. Prayer, more prayer, added prayers.

Work backwards. "They'll long for you." They'll long for you. That is a statement, I'll put it this way, Letter "B" of "Enriched Relationships." Long for you. Paul used the same word over in Philippians and he said of the Philippians, "I yearn for you with all the affection of Christ." Philippians Chapter 1. I long to be with you. I love you. I have affection for you. I mean, I hate to say it and it seems based, I suppose to say, when you see generous people with each other, just the relationship gets enhanced. That's just the way it is. You know people in your life and they're open-handed and generous toward you and if you need something, they're on it. The love between those people, it just grows. The relationship is enriched. It's enhanced.

Look at verse 13. In the middle of verse 13 it says, "because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ." Because of your submission that comes from your confession. You confess things like, hey, I'm a Christian, I'm a recipient of the good news of the



gospel. I have this grace of God in my life. But you've submitted to this thing that's hard and that is the generosity of a contribution. So here is someone who says something, they talk the talk, but all of a sudden now they're walking the walk. And we know it's costly. And people say, wow, you really do care. It's the way that your, I put it this way, Letter "C", your reputation is improved. Reputation is improved. An "Improved Reputation."

When Christians are known for the, I mean, just think about it, Christians are known for being the people who really care and they're willing to sacrifice because they care, they love and give. Guess what happens to our reputation. It gets better, because here's what a lot of people think about Christians. They're greedy. They're selfish. They'll see the fish on the plumber's truck and go, "I know what Christians do. I'm never doing business with Christians again." Now, I know a lot of that is just a smokescreen because they don't like Christ. But unfortunately, sometimes it's true. I mean, when our work is shoddy, when our love is not genuine, when we're not willing to show that we care for people more than we care for money. I mean, our reputation tanks. You know what would really be good is if it's true that in your office, everyone thought that self-professing Christian is the most caring and generous person in our office. Guess what that'll do for the reputation of all Christians? It'll improve our reputation. It'll add prayers. It'll enrich relationships. It will definitely improve our reputation.

Look at this in verse 13, "by their approval," beginning of the verse, "of this service, they will glorify God." That's a recapitulation of verse 12, which says very clearly that it's not only supplying the needs of the saints, but it's overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. How is God glorified when gifts are given? Well, because they think not only of you. Hopefully they'll send you a thank you note, but you're not doing it for that. But I know this: think about someone in a small group who gets a car signed over to them because they needed it and someone had an extra. Do you think they're going to go to sleep that night thanking God for God's provision in their life? Absolutely. Guess what happens? It overflows with thanksgiving. Thanksgivings are multiplied.

I just put it this way, "More Thanksgiving." And you know what God wants? More thanksgiving. Why? Because he's an egomaniac? No, because God is God. He's the giver of all good things. Non-Christians don't recognize that God gives us all good things. Christians are the ones who are supposed to recognize that. When you're used as an avenue to meet needs and to love people in specific ways, more people thank God and more people are glorifying God. If needs in this church, if needs in your group, if needs in your sub-congregation, if needs in your neighborhood are met. Who knows? Even non-Christians might because you show that you favor them over your money, it may be, as Jesus says, you'll make friends by means of worldly wealth, of mammon. And one day, maybe, even because of their thanksgiving to God, they will welcome you into eternal dwellings. Maybe even it'll be an act of salvation. When you tip that waiter and eventually get around to the fact that you talk about Christ because of your lavish generosity you open up doors for the gospel, maybe their lives will be like ours, called for the purpose of praising his glorious grace. Added prayers and rich relationships, improved reputation, more thanksgiving.

And it started with this interesting word in verse 13, their approval, "their approval of this service." There's so much said throughout this passage about proving love. Verse 24 in Chapter 8.



"Give proof before the churches of your love." Chapter 8 verse 8. "Prove that your love is genuine." Your generosity proves not only to other people, which is the improved reputation, but guess who else it proves something to? It proves something to you.

I had a guy Thursday asked me what I must get asked twice a month. "Pastor Mike, I just need to know how I can be sure that I'm really saved. I'm doubting myself. Am I really a Christian? Am I really set with God?" Here's what the Bible says. One way you can tell is how you love people in real sacrificial ways. Do you love your brother? And if you love your brother, do you love him more than just with your words? Do you love him in deed, as well? I can say to you, listen, you can have assurance, increased assurance, greater assurance that you and God are where you need to be if you can see this happening in your life beyond what's comfortable, moving into the uncomfortable, the area and fringe of this is a hard gift I'm giving right now.

When it says in First John, Chapter 3:16 and 17 that because he laid down his life for me, I'm going to lay down my life for my brother. If he has a need and I have the material possessions to meet that need, and I am actually going to meet that need and not close my heart to that need, then I'll know for sure that the love of God resides in me. If you look at your life right now and say I am more generous as a Christian than I was before I was a Christian, I see myself letting go of stuff I would have clasped onto and grabbed onto as a non-Christian, and now I realize it goes through my fingers a lot easier now. I fight my flesh and let it go. I let my left hand not know what the right is doing. I'm seeing this at work. It'll give you "Greater Assurance." And that's the fifth one. Added prayers and rich relationships, improved reputation, more thanksgiving, greater assurance. And that's just by looking at two verses.

It is more blessed to give than to receive in a lot of different ways. The advantage of us being generous Christians can do so much good in our world. I encourage you this Christmas to be generous, to live up to the big reputation of what the Bible says Christian should be as beloved children, walking in love, giving our lives, our selves, our time, our talent, our treasure, as an offering and sacrifice to the Lord in tangible ways for our brothers and sisters.

Around the turn of the 20th century, Henry Ford had obviously made it really big with his car manufacturing and the assembly line, and of course he was really rich by the time he did some traveling around the world. He went back to Ireland where his ancestry was from and Henry Ford when traveling through Ireland, of course, news was out that the big American entrepreneur was in their country and of course, they thought, well, he's a very rich man and some of the non-profits, we call them today, like this orphanage in Ireland said, wow, it would really be great if Henry Ford would donate a little to our cause. Of course, like a lot of things in churches and ministries, I mean, we don't have a way to generate funds unless people donate. So here's a rich guy from America, maybe he'll donate to the orphanage.

So they get a hold of Henry Ford and history says that he actually had a meeting with them. They got an audience with Henry Ford. The directors of the orphanage laid out the need and said, you know what? Here's what our orphanage is all about. Would you donate? And Henry Ford wrote a check, back in the day, I mean, it was over a hundred years ago, for 2,000 pounds, 2,000 sterling pounds, long before the euro. Right? If you want to do the inflationary adjustment to that, that's



like writing a check for \$75,000. I want you to think about that. So they have one meeting on his vacation and all of the sudden now he goes, "Oh, looks like you have a worthy cause." He writes a check for \$75,000. That's a nice little donation.

Well it made such a splash, people talked about it, heard about it, that the paper in Ireland the next morning published a story that Henry Ford had donated to this orphanage. But they got the number wrong. They added a zero by accident. They reported that Henry Ford had donated 20,000 sterling pounds. And it works out, the math works. Right? Add a zero to 75,000. What do you have? Three-quarters of a million dollars.

The director wakes up, reads the headline in the paper or the article that's on the front page of the paper, "Henry Ford Donates 20,000 Pounds to the Orphanage." He goes, "Oh, no. Word is out that he gave an equivalent of three-quarters of a million dollars to us." So the director himself gets a hold of Henry Ford's people and he goes to see him and he says, "Hey, I am so sorry that the paper reported that you gave us 20,000 pounds. Your generous gift of 2,000 pounds, that was generous. Thank you. I will go to the paper right now. I will force them to publish a retraction." Now, Henry Ford at that moment had a choice to make, didn't he? Can you imagine? Word is out on the street that you are a super generous giver to this orphanage. They're thinking, man, Henry Ford, he's got a big heart. He cares for orphans. What an amazing guy. He gave \$750,000 to this.

Henry Ford, I don't know much about his spiritual life. I know he was a churchgoer. He made a decision in that moment. Everyone out there thinks that I gave 20,000 pounds. I can let this director of the orphanage go back and have it corrected that I only gave 2,000 pounds. He sat there and made a decision and wrote him a check for 18,000 pounds and said, let me make up the difference.

You know, if someone reads the Bible and the headlines about us, we're supposed to be the ones who really genuinely care for the welfare of people and we're willing to lay down our lives for each other. That's the reputation. We can either go and try to mitigate that. Some people say, "Well, you know, in Proverbs, though, it says you better save. And I can't be all that generous because, you know, I've got to take care of my family and I have to save up my retirement." You can mitigate it and you can find biblical principles and you can quote Proverbs and you try and get people to understand, "Well, it doesn't mean that generous" or you can make the decision that Ford made. I'm not going to change the reputation that we should have. We should be the kinds of people who are lavish in our generosity. I invite you this Christmas, not to make Christmas more materialistic, I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about you starting with a Timothy kind of concern for the welfare of people around you and whatever it takes to love them in tangible ways this Christmas. Be lavishly generous because you are recipients of the inexpressible gift of Christ. I exhort you to be generous Christians this Christmas.

Let's pray. God, help us in a world of people who love their money, they love their stuff. God, we can't help but say, even in a prosperous land, easy for us to hold tightly to the material things that we have. But teach us today to love people more than we love our money, to love other people more than we love our stuff and our comfort and our convenience.



Let us learn to give with one hand and not let the other hand know what I'm doing, to fight that internal battle with myself to be more generous than I have been in the past. God, we know we can apply all this to churches and building projects and radio programs, but God, we just want to start with our hearts toward the people around us. Maybe what I do with my hours today, maybe what I do with my effort this week, maybe how I spend my money this December. But God, let it be something that reflects the fact that we love people genuinely and sincerely. Let the church be known for generous people. God, the world, they just don't have it. They don't get it. They have no reason. They have nothing but what they have in their hands and their bank accounts. But you tell us that we have you, the ultimate commodity, the ultimate asset, the ultimate assurance and security. So we want to live like you. Hold our lives in your hands. Help us to trust you, not to worry, not to fear, to meet each other's needs, not just in this room, but beyond in our neighborhoods and our families, in our workplaces. Make us generous Christians this Christmas, I pray.

In Jesus name. Amen.