

- I. **Have you heard of the “Paradox of Human Generosity”?** Christian Smith is a professor of sociology at the University of Notre Dame. He leads an effort called the **Science of Generosity Initiative** - studies the phenomenon of human generosity.
- A. In recent years, published the results of a major research study on the called *The Paradox of Human Generosity*.
- B. **Documented benefits to well-being that are associated with generosity**
1. Some examples:
 - a) Americans who volunteer 5.8 hours/month - “very happy”; verses those who report to be “unhappy” only volunteer .6 hours.
 - b) Lower depression rates among those who donate 10% or more of their income verses those who don’t.
 - c) Relational generosity - being hospitable and emotionally available with others - much more likely to be in good physical health.
 2. Not just correlative, in the book, they argue that **generosity itself is behind these benefits**.
 - a) Smith talks about **at least nine causal factors** behind positive well being that come from being generous with our resources including everything from developing a sense of self as generous to being more socially networked to being more physically active. He argues that giving involves **neuro-chemical changes in the brain**, that it gives people more pleasure chemistry in their brain, a sense of reward for having done something good. And these positive benefits create a circular loop like a spiral. **Living generously can help people become happy, healthy and directed in life, which often leads to greater generosity.**
- C. Despite the fact that there are obvious benefits to living a life that’s characterized by generosity, **very few Americans are living this way**. This is the Paradox.
1. (Show graph). Smith and Davidson believe **giving away 10% of one’s income is a good indicator of regular, ongoing generosity that sets one up to experience the benefits that come from generosity. Less than 3% of Americans do that**. In fact almost 45% of Americans don’t give anything. 87% give less than 2 percent. There seems to be a disconnect between that which is actually more likely to bring us peace of mind, including about our finances, and our commitment to doing it. Fear of scarcity tends to get in the way, and it actually makes things worse for us, rather than better.
 2. According to Smith, *“By grasping onto what we currently have, we lose out on better goods that we might have gained. In holding onto what we possess, we diminish its long-term value to us. By always protecting ourselves against future uncertainties and misfortunes, we are affected in ways that make us more anxious about uncertainties and vulnerable to future misfortunes. In short, by failing to care for others, we do not properly take care of ourselves. It is no coincidence that the word ‘miser’ is etymologically related to the word ‘miserable.’”* - Paradox of Generosity.
- D. **Preaching series on “Cultivating” practices in our lives**. Knowing the benefits, seems like we’d want to be part of that group that’s in on the secret and experiencing the benefits. Plus, **here at Haven we are a Jesus centered community**, and likely whatever we know about Jesus, we know he seemed to be a fan of giving to the poor. The famous phrase, *“It is better to give than to receive”* actually comes to us from Paul, who says he’s quoting Jesus. But if the data is correct, clearly not even the majority of church goers are regularly practicing consistent generous financial giving.
- E. **My own wariness in preaching directly on this**.

1. **I know the ways spiritual leaders have used their authority to manipulate people into giving them money.** Comedian John Oliver did a scathing story on this last year, and he was right to. Those in the televangelist world, promoting a prosperity gospel, are his specific targets, and I'll admit that, while his work there was on point throughout the whole segment, it's also hard to watch as a pastor. Many spiritual leaders in the church have exploited their position for financial gain and abused their power. I want nothing to do with that and don't want to be associated with it in any way.
 2. But at the same time, I don't want to throw the baby out with the bath water. **We are in fact a non-profit corporation that is dependent solely on the financial contributions of others.** It is through the personal giving of people in our community and the people in communities we are connected to around the country that we are even here - that *we can rent the school, that we can buy sound equipment, that we can employ a pastor, even part time.* None of this would happen without money. For this reason, as this community's leader, I feel like it only makes sense to as speak transparently and openly about how and why we think it makes sense for folks to participate in practical ways through financial generosity in this project of building a new church like Haven.
 3. **A matter of preaching what I practice...** This is not something I talk a lot about, and even as I do so, I am not trying to set myself up as a standard by which all people should be measured. *But it is real that significant giving has been a part of Jason and I's adult lives and it has been a significant part of our marriage.* I'm going to try to speak a little more openly and personally about this journey than I have before; not in the hope of holding myself up as a model by any means, but to bring you into the journey that Jason and I have been on in trying to trust God with our resources, because ultimately, it's brought us a lot of life.
- II. 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 - Paul is writing to the church in Corinth and talk at length about contributing to a collection he has been encouraging churches to support, to help the poor in the church in Jerusalem. And the church in Corinth had started taking up a collection for this, but seems to have fallen off, or not actually come through on giving it.

A. 2 Corinthians 8: 1 - 15

Now I want you to know, dear brothers and sisters, what God in his kindness has done through the churches in Macedonia. 2 They are being tested by many troubles, and they are very poor. But they are also filled with abundant joy, which has overflowed in rich generosity.

3 For I can testify that they gave not only what they could afford, but far more. And they did it of their own free will. 4 They begged us again and again for the privilege of sharing in the gift for the believers in Jerusalem. 5 They even did more than we had hoped, for their first action was to give themselves to the Lord and to us, just as God wanted them to do.

(Macedonians were Corinthians neighbors to the North. Paul points out how they have had been eager to give; even in a season of financial hardship and persecution.)

6 So we have urged Titus, who encouraged your giving in the first place, to return to you and encourage you to finish this ministry of giving. 7 Since you excel in so many ways—in your faith, your gifted speakers, your knowledge, your enthusiasm, and your love from us—I want you to excel also in this gracious act of giving.

8 I am not commanding you to do this. But I am testing how genuine your love is by comparing it with the eagerness of the other churches.

9 You know the generous grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty he could make you rich.

10 Here is my advice: It would be good for you to finish what you started a year ago. Last year you were the first who wanted to give, and you were the first to begin doing it.

11 Now you should finish what you started. Let the eagerness you showed in the beginning be matched now by your giving. Give in proportion to what you have. 12 Whatever you give is acceptable if you give it eagerly. And give according to what you have, not what you don't have. 13 Of course, I don't mean your giving should make life easy for others and hard for yourselves. I only mean that there should be some equality. 14 Right now you have plenty and can help those who are in need. Later, they will have plenty and can share with you when you need it. In this way, things will be equal. 15 As the Scriptures say,

**“Those who gathered a lot had nothing left over,
and those who gathered only a little had enough.”**

1. He's encouraging them to give. They don't have the same financial hardships these others have, and he's hoping they'll be inspired by others who gave despite the fact that they were in less comfortable position to do so.
2. What can Paul's pastoral instruction teach us about a Jesus-centered approach to generosity?

III. First and foremost, **generosity is a response to God.**

- A. We're generous with our resources because God's been generous with us.
- B. 2 Cor. 8:9, **“You know the generous grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty he could make you rich.”** (this is about more than monetary wealth, God has given everything so we could experience fullness of life and provision not otherwise possible).
- C. **God has been ridiculously generous with us.** Jesus is the ultimate embodiment of that. John 3:16 **“For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son...”**
- D. Sermon on the Mount; Jesus tells his followers to love their enemies and be gracious with them. Matthew 5:45

45 In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike...

- E. A call to generosity forces us to reflect on God's generosity towards us financially and otherwise.
 1. **New believer in college**; experiencing so much good from God coming into my life, bringing me into a dynamic connection with him and connection with people in faith communities that showed me real love and unconditional acceptance. **My church was doing a fundraising campaign** and I felt in my heart a desire to be a part of it. But I was a student who wasn't working while I was in school. I had no income to give a portion of. **Sold rice krispie treats made in the basement of my dorm, so I'd have something to**

bring. I was in touch with God's grace to me, and the response was thanksgiving and a desire to give back. **How in touch with God's generosity are you?**

IV. Generosity is not a luxury some people can afford. It's a practical act of worship all are invited to engage in.

A. background for this; OT system of giving 1/10 of everything. Throughout the OT, through the law established by Moses, people of God engaged in worship by bringing the first fruits of their harvest - the practical compensation for their labor.

1. Leviticus 27:30,32

"One-tenth of the produce of the land, whether grain from the fields or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord and must be set apart to him as holy...32 Count off every tenth animal from your herds and flocks and set them apart for the Lord as holy."

2. **This is the background for how folks had historically been practicing the sharing of their resources in worship.** Some would say, that stops with the law no longer being binding after Jesus. And in a sense, there may be some truth to that. **Paul makes clear he's not wanting people to give out of some prescriptive religious duty.** He will not command them the way Leviticus does. But at the same time, **Jesus doesn't seem to lay aside generosity as irrelevant to the gospel.** It seems to be at the heart of it for him. He seems to be going *above and beyond the law*, as he does in so many things. Remember the eager rich young man who asked Jesus what he needed to do to have eternal life and goes away disappointed because Jesus encouraged him to sell everything and give it to the poor.

B. Widow's mite - At a collection at a synagogue, a number of wealthy people are making large contributions. And then a poor widow comes and puts two small coins in the giving box. Jesus points it out to his followers. - Luke 21:3-4

"I tell you the truth," Jesus said, "this poor widow has given more than all the rest of them. 4 For they have given a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she has."

C. Paul makes the point here, essentially saying "put your money where your mouth is"

1. 2 Cor. 8:7, ***"Since you excel in so many ways—in your faith, your gifted speakers, your knowledge, your enthusiasm, and your love from us—I want you to excel also in this gracious act of giving."***

2. You're really good at the spiritual stuff. But let's make sure you're putting your faith into action. He knows this is a way of making the spiritual and immaterial practical.

3. Example: As I mentioned before, giving generously has been something Jason and I have prioritized in our marriage from early on. **We have always tried to give away a minimum of 10%** - a tithe to the local church, and at times significantly more. One particular time comes to mind in which we felt like God was inviting us to step out in faith and sacrifice. *We were in the wonderful season of life in which we had the luxury of being DINKs - Dual Income No Kids - and were considering beginning to save for our first home.*

But in the season our church at the time was going through another **giving campaign** for a building and invited all of us leaders to pray earnestly and invite God to speak to us about how much we should give. And so we did. And both Jason and I independently and together felt like **God was giving us a big number to pledge, above and beyond our regular giving. It was a number that we had no margin for.** But the more we prayed about it, the more clear it felt. And so we began to look at the budget and pray about how we could make it happen.

We ended up deciding to move into a smaller apartment, to downsize ourselves from a comfortable two bedroom to a small one bedroom apartment so we could fulfill our pledge. And that's what we did. And we experienced all kinds of life in that new smaller home. We held parties, we led small groups, I taught music lessons, and we had some of our most profound encounters with God in that little place, and at the same time, we gave away a lot of money.

4. **Paul has a bit more to say** on giving and generosity in the following chapter; stuff that really brings out the point of all of this.

D. 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. 7 You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. "For God loves a person who gives cheerfully." 8 And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others. 9 As the Scriptures say,

***"They share freely and give generously to the poor.
Their good deeds will be remembered forever."***

10 For God is the one who provides seed for the farmer and then bread to eat. In the same way, he will provide and increase your resources and then produce a great harvest of generosity in you.

11 Yes, you will be enriched in every way so that you can always be generous. And when we take your gifts to those who need them, they will thank God. 12 So two good things will result from this ministry of giving—the needs of the believers in Jerusalem will be met, and they will joyfully express their thanks to God.

13 As a result of your ministry, they will give glory to God. For your generosity to them and to all believers will prove that you are obedient to the Good News of Christ. 14 And they will pray for you with deep affection because of the overflowing grace God has given to you. 15 Thank God for this gift too wonderful for words!

V. Generosity connects us to others and allow us to play a direct role in participating in what God is doing around us.

- A. Ultimately, **generosity is something best lived you in generous community. We want to create cultures of generosity.**
- B. 2 Cor. 8:14: ***"Right now you have plenty and can help those who are in need. Later, they will have plenty and can share with you when you need it."***
 1. This is a "we're all in this together" kinda deal. **We're family. Family helps each other out.** Sometimes I help you, tomorrow you're gonna help me. And the best part of valuing others with your money, with your time, with your life is that you reap the benefit of sharing in their joy. You experience their joy when they see they're not alone; their joy when they understand God has their back and he's showing them through you.
 2. **One of my favorite parts of being a pastor is that sometimes I get to play Santa Clause.** Somebody's in crisis; they're loved one's in the hospital, they need meals to eat while they attend to them; I get to have the conversation, with others, "How can we bless this person?", and rally folks as they are eager to give towards that. Seeing the joy on the recipient's face is priceless.

3. **Jason and I have not just been on the giving side either.** We have lots of fun stories of ways we've been recipients of generosity. The times others had abundance and shared it with us. I think about a season when we were struggling financially; trying to figure out how we were gonna pay for the latest thing that went wrong with our car when **we got a check in the mail that covered the need.** Some friends told us they had been praying and felt like God prompted them that we could use the cash, which we really could. We were overwhelmed.
4. I also think of the time a mentor of mine knew that a certain conference would be potentially life-giving and important for my development, and **so she paid the airfare for me to fly across country to attend it.** (Turns out that was the conference God first spoke to me about coming to Berkeley someday.)
5. And then there have been the **innumerable times people have showed up for us in generous ways**, giving of their time and energy to bless us. **Bringing us meals** when our kid was in the hospital, or after we'd had a new baby. **Moving us from one home to another** in lightening speed: faster than any team of movers I've ever hired. **Volunteering to watch our kids** when the sitter canceled or we couldn't afford to hire one for whatever we were doing. Without that kind of grace, I wouldn't have survived the last couple months in Iowa City when I was trying to finish grad school, transition my work responsibilities, and prepare to move our whole life across the country, as a single mom for two months, since Jason moved out here ahead of us to start working. **It was only through the generosity of all of those amazing people that brought me meals, groceries, helped out with the kids, helped with the decluttering, that it was possible. And my experience as recipient of this kind of grace again and again has provoked exactly what Paul suggests:**
 6. 2 Cor. 9:13 ***"As a result of your ministry, they will give glory to God."***
- C. Ultimately, giving should take the focus off of ourselves; about being apart of what God is doing in others. Unfortunately even giving isn't always understood that way.
 1. **Public Radio fundraising campaign**, luring you with gifts. New York Times online subscription, and Peet's coffee giveaway: \$500 in goodies for donation of \$180.
 2. **Or at the theatre, pages of names printed in the program** of all the people who gave. These recognize that so often, giving can be self-serving. Securing recognition or a reward for the giving.
 3. **Prosperity doctrine has it's own version** - puts emphasis in wrong place, on the pursuit of wealth and the betterment of the individual; not the care of others. Giving to God is not a pyramid scheme. **You're not sowing the seed so that God will give you more.** *You are recognizing that God is the giver of all the seed to all of us, and we all experience the most bountiful harvest when we share what we've been given.*
- D. **My giving means that I get to share in the joy of all that happens through it.** We may not still be a part of the church where we helped buy a building, but the building we helped pay for is still blessing folks and helping them make meaningful connections to God. I have kingdom ownership in that. And sometimes we get to see up close the fruit of our labor. **I think the best part of serving in the local church in an active way is getting to see more of the impact of what you're giving.**
 1. **For those who lead worship**, it takes time and energy and sometimes a lot of thankless work rehearsing the parts, setting up the gear, but we get the joy of seeing the Spirit come and move and be poured out in amazing ways when we worship. We get the best view.

2. **When we go to the shelter**, we can see up close how much this act of generosity means to the guys we serve. And I look forward as Haven grows to even more fun ways we can directly serve the needs of the community around us.
 3. **While I was on staff at our church in Iowa City, we decided one Lent to bless our surrounding community with a \$10,000 gift.** We asked the congregation to submit ideas of worthy causes in our community that could really use the money; organizations we could partner with not just with cash but time and energy. On Easter Sunday, the church voted for one of the three top choices, and we ended up sponsoring a summer program for at risk youth at a local elementary school. Not only did we provide the funding for the program to run, but volunteers from our church showed up each day and read with the kids. In subsequent years that church has taken on a number of different projects, each time having the chance to share God's blessing through generosity in the community.
- E. If I had to sum up the whole teaching from Paul, and honestly throughout the Bible on generosity, I'd do it this way. **Generosity is about connection. It connects us with God, and it connects us with the people around us.**

VI. Tips for moving forward

- A. **Talk to God about it; invite Him to speak to you.** Discern with him
1. 2 Corinthians 9:7, "***You must each decide in your heart how much to give.***" This is between you and Jesus.
 2. From a Jesus centered point of view, at the core of this issue is the question of what role, what kind of voice we want to give Jesus in our resources. Do we want to invite Jesus to play a role in directing our path in terms of vocation, relationships, personal growth, inner healing, but when it comes to balance sheets, we'd prefer to keep God out of it? Or do we actually want to experience the good of life that we find in so many other areas of connecting with God in this area too? Can we trust God enough to let Him in on the conversation and give Him a place to speak to us about how we handle our money?
 3. Take Paul's advice to heart. Don't give out of compulsion or pressure. Give out of joy in Jesus. Give out of the grace he gives you to trust Him and to partner with Him in blessing others.
- B. **Decide on something you can do consistently:** not a couple times a year; every month is better, even if it's just a small amount. **Honor the goals you set and if they need to be reevaluated, do that with God.**
- Sometimes things change. Like the story I told earlier, as it turned out, our fortunes changed dramatically before Jason and I were able to fully fulfill the pledge we had made over a few years. We moved into the little place, we gave a lot to God's work. And then life happened in ways we hadn't anticipated. I got pregnant, and while our place was tight but doable for the two of us, it would have been particularly snug for a couple with a baby. At the same time Elliott was born, Jason had to leave working full time and go to school full time. Our financial picture changed dramatically in the period of a few months. And in that season, we continued to pray and felt release from God from our pledge, and with peace we returned to our previous level of giving while we attended to our other needs and had to adjust to life with three people and no full time jobs. And while we never quite fulfilled the pledge we made, in retrospect, I felt grateful for the whole process. The journey we took in those few years had a number of turns, but in the end **we lived more open-handedly and true to our hope in Jesus and gave more than if we had not given God permission to speak to us and invite us to take adventures with him, even with our resources.**
- C. **Look beyond financial giving.** Don't overlook the impact of your giving in non-financial ways as well. Invite God to lead you in those too.

Transition into a time of responsive worship with prayer by St. Ignatius of Loyola - leader of Jesuits -

***Lord, teach me to be generous.
Teach me to serve you as you deserve;
to give and not to count the cost,
to fight and not to heed the wounds,
to toil and not to seek for rest,
to labor and not to ask for reward,
save that of knowing that I do your will.***