**THE HU$TLE IS OVER**

**Part 4 of 6**

**We’re New…Let’s Live Like It!**

**2 Corinthians 8:7-12**

It’s time to open our Bibles and dive into God’s Word – but first, HOW ARE YOU? During this series, my prayer has been that all of us would have our view of Jesus enlarged.

So please grab your Bibles and turn to the NT Book of 2 Corinthians 8. And as you’re turning there, I’ll remind you that we’re in the 5th week of our series “THE HU$TLE IS OVER.” Quick review…

Week #1 “He Owns It…We Use It!” (Luke 12:13-21)

Week #2 “He’s Faithful…(so) Don’t Worry!” (Luke 12:22-34)

Week #3 “He’s King…And He’s Worthy!” (Matthew 6:19-24)

Week #4 “We’re New…Let’s Live Like It!” (2 Corinthians 8:7-12)

There’s a virus—worse than the one we’re dealing with right now—called “affluenza.” It’s like a disease promising to make us happy for $49.99, while in fact it’s a hustler in the shadows pulling our strings and stealing our money and with it, our joy. TIME IS TELLING THE CATASTROPHIC DAMAGE THAT MATERIALISM IS DOING TO THE SOUL OF OUR SOCIETY. This lie we all believe—more stuff means more security, freedom, and power—is wreaking havoc on our emotional health and spiritual lives.

This reminds me of a line from Psalm 39: “In vain they rush about, heaping up *stuff* without knowing whose it will finally be.”

* What if the formula “more stuff equals more happiness” is bad math?
* What if more stuff often just equals more stress? More hours at the office, more debt, more years working on a job we don’t feel called to, more time wasted cleaning and maintaining and fixing and playing with and organizing and reorganizing all that junk we don’t even need.
* What if more stuff actually equals less of what matters most? Less time. Less financial freedom. Less generosity. Less peace. Less focus on what life’s actually about. Less mental real estate for creativity. Less relationships. Less margin. Less prayer. Less of what we actually ache for.
* What if we were to reject our crazy culture’s messaging as a half-truth, if not a full-on lie, and live another message?
* What if we truly believed that because of GRACE—the hustle is over?

Grace can take us places husting can’t!

If you’re new to Calvary, I feel like I need to say, *“Don’t worry…you’ll find out soon enough that we aren’t a church that’s always harping on money*.” I realize that’s a common sentiment in the general public…that churches are always begging for more money.

And that isn’t the case here, but at the same time, money is a very relevant and frequent topic in the Bible, which means we can’t ignore it. For all the flack that pastors get for talking about money too much …

* There are 2000 verses in the Bible about money
* Jesus actually had a ton to say on the subject—16 of his parables related to money
* There’s more teaching on money in the NT than on heaven or hell or prayer…

So, it’s quite obvious that money’s a very important subject to God—precisely because it’s a very important subject to US! As Kim and I have spoken to many of YOU during this unprecedented time, we’ve heard the same concern again and again—even more than the virus, people are concerned about their money.

As we’ve already seen the past couple of weekends, Jesus said, *“Wherever your treasure is, there your heart will be also”* (Matt. 6:21; Luke 12:34). So, there’s a direct link between our material wealth and the passions of our life. Think of it like this: *Where treasure goes…passion flows*.

You know, quite often I still get asked about my opinion on tithing. If you’ve been around church for any length of time, you’ve undoubtedly heard the t-word. The word “tithe" is not a bad word. It simply means 10%. So, for example, some folks will ask questions like this:

* Should believers still tithe today?
* Wasn’t tithing part of the Law from which we’ve been set free?
* Are we cursed if we don’t tithe?

And those are great questions. I think for most people, it shows that they really want to honor the Lord with their finances, and that’s fantastic! And those questions deserve honest, well-grounded answers from the Bible. Quickly, let’s talk about tithing!

## Tithing began before the law. Some teach that since the tithe was a part of the Levitical Law, that we’ve now been set free from tithing. However, even though we no longer live under an obligation to tithe, the tithe was established prior to the law. Here are a couple of examples:

* In Genesis 14 after Abram raided those who’d kidnapped his people, he gave a tenth—the tithe—to Melchizedek, the priest of God Most High.
* In Genesis 28:22 Jacob declared to God, “…and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You.” Jacob was grateful to the Lord, so out of a thankful heart and honor to God, he pledged to always give Him a tenth of his increase. Through the tithe, Jacob was acknowledging that he couldn’t have done this for himself, but that all of his increase came from God.

When the Law was established, giving a tenth plus additional offerings was a requirement. In fact, there was a curse placed upon anyone who didn’t follow all of the hundreds of commandments in the law, which included tithing. Yet, in Galatians 3:13 it clearly states that we’ve been set free from the curse of the law**. Therefore, if we tithe today, under the NC, we receive all of the blessings of tithing, but none of the curses!**

Some people quote the OT and say that if you don’t tithe, you’re robbing God. This is absolutely true, but not in the way most people mean. Under the law, if you didn’t give tithes and offerings, then you were robbing God, because it was a requirement according to the Law. **However, under the NC you’re robbing God of the opportunity to bless you!**

Do you know that God’s faithfully supplying His grace to us in every area of our lives? Because of Jesus’ finished work on the cross, God’s grace—His supply—His blessing—is constantly and freely flowing to us.

You might be wondering, “Why then am I not seeing this supply?”

Maybe it’s because you’re choking the flow.

“What do you mean by ‘choking the flow’? How do I choke God’s flow of grace?”

Imagine that there are many pipes coming down from heaven. These are flexible pipes and they’re all ministering God’s manifold grace into every area of your life. There’s a pipe for healing, a pipe for provision, a pipe for relationships, a pipe for marriage, and so on.

God’s supply through these pipes is always flowing. However, whenever we refuse to trust God in a particular area in our lives, the supply is choked. You see, unbelief is essentially us taking on the demand to solve our problems ourselves. It’s us believing we what it takes to make things happen.

## Church, now more than ever, it’s time that we let go, let it flow, and give God permission to bless us!

We have to give God permission to bless us in our lives. He’s given us free will, so it isn’t automatic!

* God won’t save you against your will.
* He won’t heal you against your will.
* He won’t bless your finances against your will.
* He must have your permission!

**Although God is all-powerful, He isn’t all-controlling.** Part of the free will mankind’s been given is that we have to invite God into our finances, and that’s done by giving to him by faith.

**It takes faith to tithe!**

If you don’t believe there’s a God and that this stuff works, then why would you tithe? There’s no logical reason to tithe. If you need extra money (and we all do right now), why would you give 10% or more away? In the natural realm, 90% is less than 100%. But God’s economy is different. When you tithe, you’re saying, “God, I’m trusting You in my finances,” and you’re allowing God to come into your finances and prosper you more and more. You’re letting go and letting it flow. You’re giving God permission to bless you.

I can hear it now! “Pastor Ben, you’ve been saying during this series that we don’t GIVE to GET. Rather, we GET to GIVE.” That’s right! We don’t GIVE, or do anything else in the name of Jesus, in order to garner God’s favor. Every curse of our sin was already absorbed into the body of Jesus when He hung on the cross in our place. So, we don’t give in order to get goodies from God. Ephesians 1 says that we’ve *already* been blessed (past tense) with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. Again, God’s grace—His supply—is constantly and freely flowing to us.

So, against that backdrop, it’s entirely appropriate to ask the question, *“If we’re not under the OC concerning tithing…then what truly ARE the motivations for generosity under God’s NC of grace?”*

Well, the NT gives us some really great reasons to be generous—but it’s *never* because we feel like we have to measure up to a particular standard in order to keep God happy. God’s already happy – because Jesus already measured up to that standard in our place, and then He gave us His perfection as a free gift. That’s called the gift of righteousness.

Now, please don’t misunderstand what I’m saying. I’m aware that many Christians—including Kim and I—use the 10% mark as a consistent minimum baseline for giving to God through the local church. Not every Christian who uses the 10% framework is doing so because they feel obligated to the keep the Law. Some of us are genuinely motivated by love and we use the 10% mark not because we feel like God will curse us if we don’t – but simply because we believe that’s a reasonable place to start. We trust God. We don’t want to choke the supply.

In our case, I look at the Lawful requirements given under Moses—no matter WHAT subject it may relate to (parenting, marriage, civic duty, or whatever)—and I cannot find a single case in Scripture in which any moral standard that was required by law under the OC has been cheapened or down-graded when inspired by grace under the NC!

If anything, the “law of love”—so to speak—inspires and empowers me to live at an even HIGHER expression of God’s character than simply obeying minimal external rules and standards. For example…

* Under the OC – I’m required to love my neighbor as myself. But under the NC, Jesus commands that I love others in the same manner that HE loves me!
* Under the OC – I’m required not to commit adultery. Under the NC – I am empowered to love my wife as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her.
* Under law – I’m required to forgive a person seven times. Under love – I’m inspired to forgive 70 times 7 (in other words, as often as a person sins against me).
* Under Moses – I’m required to teach my children the Law of the Lord. Under Jesus – I’m inspired to demonstrate the love of Christ in the way that I relate to my kids and to their mom.
* Under the Old System – I’m required to treat those under my authority with some minimal standards of fairness. Under the New System – I’m empowered to treat them with 100% equality as my fellow human beings, even though they may be under my authority.
* Under the legal code – I’m required to refrain from murdering people. Under grace, I’ve been set free to pro-actively love my enemies and pray for those who persecute me.

Again, NEVER is the bare-minimum standard under the Law in any way down-graded under the life of grace. In fact, it’s elevated to such an impossibly high standard that that there’s no way I can attain it—UNLESS I’m living in daily dependence upon Jesus to do it through me. One is trying, and the other is trusting.

So, we can obviously see how this carries over into the realm of our *generosity* with the resources God’s entrusted to us. If a certain percentage is what’s REQUIRED by law – then by contrast, what level of generosity will be INSPIRED by love as an overflow of my grateful heart?

Very briefly – I want to look at a few words that Paul writes in 2 Corinthians – about generosity under the New Covenant way of life. 2 Corinthians 9:7 is very clear:

“Each one should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

This is probably the clearest summary in the NT of what it looks and feels like to be generous under our New and Better Covenant. Paul’s words assure us that God isn’t looking for people to give because they feel like their arms are being twisted. Evidently, God’s perspective on generosity—and every other aspect of the NC life—is that GRATEFULNESS inspires GENEROSITY.

And the NT is filled with this kind of language. For example, Jesus said that whoever has been forgiven much, loves much. John wrote that we love because He first loved us. Paul inspires gratefulness when he writes *“while we were God’s enemies, Christ died for us!”*

And the tone of every command in the NC always flows from this quality of gratefulness. In other words, *“As we’re increasingly overwhelmed with the one-way love of God and His benevolent storehouse of grace that He’s poured out upon people as undeserving as us – GRATEFULNESS becomes the pre-eminent attitude of our lives!”*

And out of GRATEFULNESS flows GENEROSITY. Nobody can out-give God! Nobody can pay God back and nobody can pay God off. And thankfully He isn’t asking us for that! He’s simply wanting us to live with such a strong revelation of His grace toward us, that the natural fruit is insane gratefulness, resulting in generosity.

So, if you and I aren’t increasingly grateful people—that simply means we don’t understand the Gospel yet. And that’s okay because God’s patient with our growth. We’re all going to struggle with moments of greed or lust or pride in various forms. But when those things remain the dominant characteristic of our lives…it shows us that we don’t yet grasp the degree to which God has poured out His one-way love upon us. We just don’t get it yet.

And that’s why Paul actually begins his teaching on giving a chapter earlier in 2 Corinthians 8:7… Let’s look at a few things…

“But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.”

So, Paul affirms right off the bat exactly what I’ve been saying. In fact, I stole everything I just said from him. I’m a full-on plagiarizer. I have the greatest job in the world! I just steal things that God’s already said, and I share them with you week after week….

But seriously…he goes on to say in verse 8…

**“**I am not commanding you *(as though what I’m about to say is some legalistic requirement)*, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others.”

What is he saying here by *“test the sincerity of your love”?* What he’s doing is drawing attention to the fact that the way we relate to money is a direct reflection of whether the love of Christ is flowing through us. In fact, there’s perhaps no single GREATER reflection of the attitude of our minds than by looking at the money trail of our lives. He goes on to say in verse 9…

**“**For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, *(there’s that darn word again…grace! Grace, grace, grace…man – doesn’t that crazy Apostle have anything else to talk about?)* that though he was rich *(speaking of Christ in all His heavenly glory as the Son of God)*, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.”

So again, Paul’s linking the motivation for OUR generosity – to a deepening grasp of exactly what God’s given us in Christ. Jesus became poor – giving of Himself completely – so that we could become “rich” in Him. And Paul’s saying that he’s excited for these Corinthians because he’s finally starting to see God’s generosity in the spiritual realm bear fruit in the physical realm. Look at verse 10:

**“**And here is my advice about what is best for you in this matter. Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so.”

So, Paul’s making an incredibly important statement here. He’s rejoicing because ALL of his preaching and teaching about the grace of the NC—is finally starting to produce a grateful response in their lives. If you remember, when Paul wrote his FIRST letter to this same group of people – they were consumed with narcissism. They basically looked NO different from the world. And Paul calls them on it. But even in his rebuke, he repeatedly focuses their attention upon God’s grace as the power that would set them free from their selfishness!

So, you can imagine the struggles Paul must have faced as the Apostle to the Gentiles. *“Am I doing the right thing? Am I planting the right seeds? Do my critics have a legitimate point? Are these people gonna just keep on abusing God’s grace as a license to become lazy? Are they ever going to change? Man…it was so much easier when I was a Pharisee and could just beat people over the head with the Law!”*

So, he commends them because they aren’t only the first Gentile church to begin GIVING faithfully – but even more importantly they now had a sincere DESIRE to give. It was *compassion* rather than *compulsion*. It was *love* rather than *Law*. It was trusting, rather than trying. It was beauty, rather than duty. It was a work of grace rather than GUILT. And Paul says in verse 11:

**“**Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means.”

It’s one thing to WANT to do it…it’s another thing to put your hand to the plow and get it done! Look at verse 12:

**“**For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.”

In other words, when they gave out of their willingness rather than out of religious obligation, their gifts were acceptable to God…because their giving wasn’t based on measuring up to a certain percentage to impress or appease Him…nor was it based on whether a person was wealthy or poor…it was done *willingly*—motivated and generated by the power of Christ’s love at work within them.

And as your pastor, I also want to encourage you the way Paul did – to follow through and allow the grace of God to lead you into even greater degrees of that cheerful giving that God loves so much! When we are generous, we express the character of God more genuinely than in any other way.

Love GIVES. It’s that simple. God Himself being our greatest example… (For God so loved the world…. He GAVE…)

Let me close by giving you some practical take-aways to jot down that will hopefully encourage your heart greatly.

**Graceful Giving: Four Reasons to Be Generous**

The first one is probably the most obvious…. which is…

1. To PRACTICE living by your new identity
2. To meet PRACTICAL needs
3. To experience PERSONAL transformation
4. To PARTICIPATE in a spiritual harvest