

Rev. Joan Pell
Sierra Pines United Methodist Church
Sermon: 09/16/2018
Series: *Extravagant Generosity: The Heart of Giving*
Scripture: 1 Timothy 6:17-19



EKG



<1 Timothy 6:17-19>

*17 As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. 18 **They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share,** 19 thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the **life that really is life.***

To check for signs of heart disease, doctors use a procedure called an electrocardiogram or an EKG. It's a test that records the electrical activity of your heart through small electrode patches attached to your skin. As we do not have an EKG monitor here, can you find your heartbeat? Did you all find a pulse? I know you are all alive, so it is there somewhere! But if we checked our spiritual pulse, what would we find? Over the next few weeks, we will find some ways to check our spiritual health. We began the process this morning when we turned in those heart cards identifying what we love about our church. Today we will consider how Paul begins to address the subject of spiritual health.

While the idea of who is rich has many answers, the truth is that we in the United States are materially blessed when compared with the rest of the world's population. Some of our lifestyle choices might not leave much margin, but by most standards, we are extremely well off. It often seems that the more we have, the more we worry about keeping what we have and about getting more. When that is the focus of our thoughts, expressing faith in God is more of a challenge.

Bishop Robert Schnase in his book *Five Practices for Fruitful Congregations* says that when people with different incomes are asked, "How much income would it take for you to be happy?" most answer that 20% more would ease their burdens and bring security. In other words, people who earn 20% less than you, think they will be happy if they earn what you earn. Happiness based on possessions will never satisfy us. It always leaves you wanting more. This is a spiritual issue and not just a financial issue. Are we going to listen to the wisdom of the world or the wisdom of God?¹

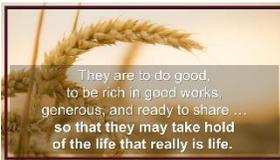
¹ Robert Schnase, *Five Practices for Fruitful Congregations* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 113-114.



Paul’s remedy is to put our faith in God. He suggests that we do good things, that we should be **rich in good deeds, and that we be generous and willing to share.** Today we have shared what we love about our church and where we see Jesus in our church.



Examples: Lauren, AJ, Owen, Marie, Andrew, Fellowship, Mission Projects, Small Groups, Advocacy, Feeding, Buildings



Then Paul says that there is a difference between just living in our culture and living a Christian life—what Paul calls “truly life.” **so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.**



Selfishness, self-centeredness and greed are not attributes that we admire. Being generous and willing to share are things that we admire and aspire to. No stories from scripture tell of people living the God-related spiritual life while fostering a greedy attitude. Acquisitiveness does not foster a life rich in God. How people use what they have matters to God. Generosity extends beyond money, but it includes it and is a fruit of the spirit. **Generosity flows from the heart; first from God’s heart into ours, and then from our hearts into the world.**²



Some of you are reading the daily devotional *Practicing Extravagant Generosity: Daily Readings on the Grace of Giving* by Robert Schnase. In the reading for Tuesday, the author recalls one spring when he saw various birds preparing to build their nests. He talks about how we metaphorically compare our homes to nests saying things like: “You’ve built quite a nest for yourself here!” We use the idiom ‘nest egg’ to mean a sum of money that we have saved for *our* future. And an empty nest when the children have left home. The word *nest* often connotes shelter,

² Sally D. Sharpe, *Extravagant Generosity: The Heart of Giving: Small Group Leader Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 16-17.

coziness, homelike, comfortable and we think of it as providing for our own comfort or security. Schnase points out that the nests that birds build are not for their benefit but for the benefit of their young - for the next generation. Like birds, we build nests in our churches: the buildings, programs, ministries and services. Are they for our own comfort or for the benefit of future generations?³

Sometimes, we get so caught up in what we want, the way we like it, or the way that it has always been done, that we forget that we need to look towards the comfort of those who are newer, or to those whom we should be inviting to come in. And we can celebrate that that is why we are a Reconciling Congregation, because we want to be a place that is welcoming to all God's children. But we still need to make sure that we do not shut anyone out because what we are doing is comfortable for us and uncomfortable to newcomers.

Every tangible item that we have here, this building, the altar, the chairs, the piano, the hymnals, the screens, the kitchen equipment, the office furniture, computers and printer, the new roof. **All of these things are the fruit of someone's generosity.** We are blessed.



In Wednesday's daily reading, Schnase reflecting on the helicopter-like seeds that fall from the trees at this time of year. His son calls them seeds with wings and the wind can carry them quite long distances, rather than just dropping them in the immediate vicinity. So much of the impact of our lives and grace and love of God that we sow impacts those that are closest to us. But we are also called to extend God's grace beyond our own small circle.

48 Luci Lights to Gaza. 210 Health kits to immigrants to UMCOR – know some went to Arizona. Through our Annual Conference - Africa University & recovery in Puerto Rico. Hymnals to CA church destroyed by fire at Clear Lake. Prayer shawls. Recipient: Paintings from Haiti; Olive crosses from Palestine. There is no end to what God can accomplish anywhere in the world when our seeds have wings and our generosity moves beyond ourselves.



Each of these seeds we sow is like a thread woven into a tapestry. Each song we sing or step we dance, each nail we pound or march we join, each rift we mend, or check we write is one small part of the greater whole as our hearts beat in rhythm with one another.⁴

³ Robert Schnase, *Practicing Extravagant Generosity: Daily Readings on the Grace of Giving* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 14-15.

⁴ Metaphors taken from the song "For One Great Peace" aka 'This Thread I Weave' in TFWS 2185.



God uses our giving to change us and to give us different motivations. Giving moderates our desires to acquire more and aims us at what ultimately satisfies. It draws us closer to God and aligns us more closely with God's desire for us.⁵ It makes us spiritually healthier.

There is much to love about our church, and perhaps we don't celebrate those things enough, so let's enjoy this time of celebration in the next few weeks. It's not too late to pick up and start reading the devotional guide *Practicing Extravagant Generosity*. And next week you will bring back our second heart card and identify a person in the church who has contributed to your spiritual growth. So, come next week prepared to share and to celebrate!

Thanks be to God,
Amen.

Let us pray...

*<Meditate on Video>*⁶

Lord, help us to see how rich we truly are, both in material possessions and in the blessings you shower upon us each day. May we who are rich learn to share what we have with others. Remind us that striving after worldly possessions and selfish pursuits is hollow and empty and that the practice of giving directs us towards what ultimately satisfies. Help us to find abundance in our willingness to give, so that we may begin to live a life that is truly never ending. Amen.

Resources

Reeves, Michael & Jennifer Tyler. *Extravagant Generosity: Planning Kit: The Heart of Giving*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011.

⁵ Schnase, *Daily Readings*, 21.

⁶ Michael Reeves & Jennifer Tyler, *Extravagant Generosity: Small Group and Worship DVD: The Heart of Giving* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), Small Group: EKG.