

**Generosity**      Exodus 16:11-21a      October 15, 2017  
Oak Grove Presbyterian Church      Bill Chadwick

**Thoughts to Ponder** (all from the book, *Contagious Generosity*)

“Developing a culture of generosity begins with an understanding of who owns what. If I own what I have, am, and will become, then it is mine to give at my discretion. But if God owns it all, then I am merely an instrument of generosity designed to distribute (God’s) resources for the abundant advancement of the kingdom.”

—Chris Willard & Jim Sheppard

“The goal of giving is not just funding local church ministry; it’s participating in a revolution that God is orchestrating through believers around the world.”—Brian Tome

“Generosity is something we want *for* you, not *from* you.” —Andy Stanley

I love preaching about money.

However, I have to confess that as your pastor and as the primary preacher around here, I have not been faithful to Jesus in this area. Because I don’t preach about money nearly as often as he did. It was his second favorite topic, next to the Kingdom of God. Why did Jesus talk about money so much? He knows how important it is.

I have also been unwise in preaching about money only during our fall campaign. I should be preaching about money often, not just as we’re starting to look at next year’s budget. Because I don’t want you to think that what I am doing is *fundraising*. If we were merely fundraising I would simply say, “Look, folks, it takes X amount of dollars to run this organization. Cough it up.” We’re not fundraising. Our aim is to teach discipleship, how best to follow Jesus, how to be joyful and fulfilled in life!

The Session *does* want you to give money to Oak Grove, that is, to share some of the money God has given you. Why? That’s the first part of this sermon. Why give? First, because humans have a need to give and it’s fun to give. We are created in the image of God, whose very heart is giving. It’s an expression of power

to give. We want you to be generous, not so much for the good of the church, but for your own good, your own joy, and to fulfill your calling as a disciple of Jesus.

Two. We also want you to give so that you will love the church even more than you do now. Jesus said, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Isn’t that interesting? Seems backwards.

I remember counseling with a young man who was a few months out of college. He was kind of lost and depressed. Among other things, he commented, “I need to feel better about myself before I can look for a job.” Among other things, I suggested, “Get a job. You’ll feel better about yourself.” We know that our feelings influence our actions, but perhaps even more powerfully our actions influence our feelings. We go work out, we feel better. We do a good deed, we feel better.

Jesus is saying, if you want to get emotionally invested in something, make a significant *financial* investment. When it’s the Church you invest in, it’s a way to jumpstart your spiritual life. Seriously.

Third reason to give? We are inviting you to invest in the Kingdom of God. Giving to the church is a way to fulfill what Jesus said were the two greatest commandments: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul and all your strength” and “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

(Bill) At the Opportunity Fair this fall a number of you shared your reasons for giving.

(Slide show) “Why I give...” (Many examples, most along the line of “As a way of showing thanks,” “To give back for what I have been given,” “Because Oak Grove does good work,” “to continue the marvelous work of OGPC,” “because I am a sharing person,” ...)

Now. How much to give? (What Dave Kachel called, “The sermon on the amount.”)

The common biblical example is a tithe, 10% of our income. (I read that if you actually total all the offerings commanded of the Israelites it comes to 31% of annual income.) At any rate, the tithe is not law, it’s a guideline. What I believe the scriptures demand is that we give proportionately—proportional to our means

and our needs—and that we give faithfully. For some, tithing might be an unwise hardship, for others, it would not be nearly enough to be faithful.

Proportionately and Faithfully. Say it with me. “Proportionately and Faithfully.”

I also don’t expect you to give all of your charitable giving to the church. But I do expect you will give most of your charitable giving to the church. Why? Because we have the lowest overhead and fund-raising costs. Because thousands of people are supporting the American Cancer Society or the Humane Society, and only a few hundred people are supporting Oak Grove. But more than these, I expect most of our charitable giving to come to the church because it is THE CHURCH, the body of Christ, the manifestation of our first allegiance...to God.

Now I want to share a number of stories with you. Some I have shared before. And so it’s less boring I’m inviting Mary and Nathan to read some of these. (They come forward.)

Former Oak Grove pastor Dave Kachel liked to tell the story of his long ago Sunday School teacher, who said, “I’ve never met an unhappy tither and I’ve never met one who quit.”

(Nathan) A biographer of the Duke of Wellington noted that he had a distinct advantage over previous biographers because he discovered the great man’s ledger book. The biographer said, “I knew what he spent his money on, so I knew what he truly considered important.” Our spending records are theological documents; they indicate what we worship.

(Bill) A few years back, during the depths of the Recession the results of our fall stewardship campaign were not as good as we hoped. The pledges weren’t going to cover the ministry we felt God was calling us to do. What should we do? One suggestion was that we go back and ask the congregation for more. One of our newer members, a young man with little kids and not lots of money, who nevertheless tithed, said to me, “How would that work? Asking for more? Hasn’t everyone already given all they can give?” He was dead serious. He had given all he could. He understood what it meant to be faithful with his money. I had to tell him that, unfortunately, not everyone got it. If everyone had been as faithful as he

and his wife were, we would have money coming out of our ears. Oh, the ministry we could be doing!

(Mary) Proportionate and faithful. Another story. A pastor had made an appeal for a great and worthy cause. A certain woman, a member of the church, came to him and handed him a check for \$50, asking at the same time if her gift was satisfactory. The pastor immediately replied, "If it represents you." There was a moment of soul-searching thought, she frowned, and she asked to have the check returned to her. She left with it and a day or two later she returned, handing the pastor a check for \$5,000 and again asked the same question, "Is my gift satisfactory?" The pastor gave the same answer as before, "If it represents you." As before, a truth seemed to be working its way into her heart and mind. The next day she returned and handed the pastor a check saying, "I've thought and prayed about this a lot. This gift represents me, who I am." It was a check for \$50,000. Most of us can't do that figure, but all of us can make a commitment that represents us.

(Nathan) Tony Campolo is a retired sociology professor and a marvelous preacher. In about 1978 he and his wife decided that, regardless of how much money they made, they were going to live on \$18,000 a year (adjusted for inflation over the years, today that would be about \$68,000 a year) and give the rest away. Over the years Tony has spoken all over the world. He has written many books that were very popular. He's not tithing. He's maybe *reverse* tithing, giving away 90% and living on 10%. He has personally funded hundreds of young men and women to share the gospel around the world.

(Bill) Any of you know the name Joe Selvaggio? A remarkable man. In 1972 he founded Project for Pride in Living here in the Twin Cities, which is a wonderful organization helping low-income folks find housing and jobs. A few years ago he founded the One Percent Club. This was before the Occupy Wall Street Movement and talking about the 1% richest Americans. But it does have to do with wealthy people. So for a minute I'm only going to be talking to you who have a net worth above a million dollars. Total net worth, value of your house, your investments and savings, your cars, your cabin, if you have one. Think for a minute. What is your net worth? If it's over a million dollars I'm talking to you. The rest of you don't need to listen. I'll call you back to attention in a bit. I'm just going to talk to the wealthy people for a minute. (But I've really got everybody's attention now, don't I? "What's he going to say to the rich people?")

Joe Selvaggio recognized that many people of wealth may not have much annual income, so instead of challenging wealthy people to give a percentage of their annual *income*, his challenge to wealthy people is to each year give away 1% of their *net worth*. If your net worth is 5 million dollars, that's \$50,000. Fifty thousand dollars seems like a lot, but it's ONE percent. Most wealthy people's investments grow by much more than that each year. So I invite you few folks who have net worth in the millions to do that. Give one percent to Oak Grove this year. Not one percent of your liquid assets, but of your total assets. Each year. At least one percent.

How much money did John D Rockefeller leave behind when he died?

(Mary and Nathan count silently to three, then simultaneously say,...) "All of it."

(Mary) Andrew Carnegie said, "The man who dies rich dies disgraced."

(Nathan) Jesus said, "To those whom much has been given, much will be expected."

(Bill) That applies to talent, to money, and time.

Okay, everybody back. Two more minutes. I'll let Mary and Nathan sit down now.

Think about your current giving. Is it proportionate and faithful? If it is, you don't need to listen to this next part. If you think, "Well, I have to admit that maybe I'm not where I should be in the giving department," then I invite you to take one of two challenges. I've got a medium-sized challenge and a giant challenge.

First, figure out what percentage of your income you are giving now to the Kingdom of God through Oak Grove. Then for 2018 increase that percentage by one percentage point. (Not one percent, but one percentage *point*.) For example, if you are making \$60,000/year and you are giving \$100 a month, \$1200 a year, that's 2%. I invite you to add one percentage point, from 2% to 3%. Go to \$1800/year. And add a percentage point each year until you feel like you are at a proportionate and faithful amount. Another math example: If you are making \$100,000 and giving \$500/month, that's \$6000/year or 6%. Make it 7% for next year. \$7000/year. Up 1 percentage point per year.

That's the medium-sized challenge. My pastor friends tell me that works for some people.

But I'm into big exciting challenges.

For those of you who really want to get revved up about your faith I invite you to make the leap in one bound, up to what you think would truly be proportionate and faithful, for many of us that's the tithe, 10% of income. But whatever figure you and God decide would be proportionate and faithful.

Here's my annual challenge. Take the leap. In a week or so you will receive a pledge card. Fill in the amount that you believe God is calling you, to be faithful and proportionate. That may be a big leap. Then try it for three months, January, February, March. If at the end of March this isn't working for you—you're not making ends meet, your spiritual life hasn't improved—let me know. I will instruct our financial secretary to give you your money back and I will pay you out of my own pocket an additional 2.5%, that's 10% annual interest. Guaranteed. The best deal in town.

Finally, as I remind you and remind myself each year, "Ultimately, God doesn't want X percent of our money. God wants 100 percent of our lives."