

**Cultivating Faithful Generosity**  
**A Safeguard Against Greed**  
**Mark 10:17-31**  
**Layne Lebo**  
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Have you ever wondered why Jesus talked about stewardship of wealth and possessions so much while we're so uncomfortable with the topic? I'm convinced many of us are less than enthusiastic about sermons related to money due to skepticism. We're skeptical about the motivations of pastors and churches asking us for our money. We're skeptical about how our money will be used. And, frankly, we're skeptical of leaders in general. Our skepticism is well founded. Pastors and churches have a questionable track record when it comes to their motivation in asking for our money. Churches often use the money they're given to care exclusively for their own needs rather than blessing others, and too frequently, leaders have broken our trust by failing to lead with integrity. I'm convinced that the widespread skepticism in our culture explains why many of us aren't excited to hear another sermon on giving, but can we safely ignore or gloss over a topic Jesus spent so much time on? To explore why Jesus focused on wealth and possessions so much, I encourage you to turn with me to Mark 10. I'll begin reading at verse 17.

<sup>17</sup> As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

<sup>18</sup> "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. <sup>19</sup> You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.'"

<sup>20</sup> "Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy."

<sup>21</sup> Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

<sup>22</sup> At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

<sup>23</sup> Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!”

<sup>24</sup> The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! <sup>25</sup> It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”

<sup>26</sup> The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, “Who then can be saved?”

<sup>27</sup> Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.”

<sup>28</sup> Then Peter spoke up, “We have left everything to follow you!”

<sup>29</sup> “Truly I tell you,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel <sup>30</sup> will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. <sup>31</sup> But many who are first will be last, and the last first.” (Mark 10:17-31)

I find this to be one of the most difficult passages in the Bible for several reasons:

- An upstanding man comes to Jesus and respectfully asks him an important question, but Jesus appears to treat him dismissively and ultimately sends him away.
- Jesus’ instructions to this man to “go, sell everything you have and give to the poor” seems extremely unreasonable.
- When his disciples balked at Jesus’ response instead of qualifying it, Jesus said something even more difficult: “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”

So, what’s going on here? Does Jesus have something against rich people? Does Jesus think everyone who has significant wealth should give all they have to the poor? What are we to make of this passage? Before we answer those questions, I’d like to back up a bit and take a closer look at what was going on with this man who came to Jesus.

The man came to Jesus asking what he needed to do to inherit eternal life—an important question for all of us to wrestle with. As we look at Jesus’ response, it’s important to understand that when Jesus interacted with people—think of Nicodemus, the woman at the well, the man who brought his son to Jesus to be delivered from an evil spirit—his goal seemed to be to bring them to a fuller understanding of themselves so they could recognize their own shortcomings and their need of Him. To help them get to that place, Jesus often asked probing, difficult questions. In response to this man’s question about what he needed to do to be assured of eternal life, Jesus listed six of the 10 commandments and told him he needed to follow those. The man responded that he’d kept all of them since he was a boy. I find it interesting that the commandments Jesus listed were the commandments that pertained to how people interact with other people. He didn’t list the four commandments that focus on our love and devotion to God. Jesus saw that while this man was trying to do all of the right things, what was missing in his life was love for and worship of God.

After the man responded that he’d kept all the commandments since he was a boy, we read these telling words in verse 21: “Jesus looked at him and loved him.” It’s impossible to understand Jesus’ interaction with this man apart from those words. Everything Jesus did in interacting with this rich man was out of his heart of love for Him and his desire for this guy to experience God’s best in his life.

After looking at him with love, Jesus told the man to sell everything he had, give it to the poor, and follow Jesus. The disciples were amazed and perplexed. After all, this was the kind of guy they could have used on their side. He was a good, respectable guy, and he had money. I want to focus on Jesus’ response to this man before we examine what He said to his disciples.

What did Jesus notice in this man, and why did He give him such a difficult answer? As Jesus looked at this man, He immediately saw that greed had a vice grip-like hold on his heart. The man was focused on works, appearance and doing good deeds. He called Jesus “Good teacher,” to which Jesus responded by saying, “No one is good—except God alone.” The man followed the commandments that focused on how he treated others, but his love for God was lacking. Jesus responded to the man with the radical instruction to sell everything he had and

give it to the poor, because He knew the man needed to do something radical to break the hold that greed had over him.

Jesus continued this line of reasoning with his disciples. He told them it was easier for a camel to slip through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter God's kingdom, and when the disciples asked, "Well, who then can be saved?" Jesus told them it was impossible for anyone to be saved... apart from God.

My challenge for us this morning is not to give everything we have away, but what I want us to see is this: God's challenge to his people in the Old Testament to tithe—giving 10% of everything they had back to Him—his challenge in the New Testament for us to be generous givers, and his challenge for you and me to be faithful stewards of all He has blessed us with by cultivating generosity is a safeguard against greed. God calls his people to give not because He needs our money but because He knows that cultivating a generous heart loosens the grip greed has on us. Remember Jesus' words from Matthew 6 that I shared last week: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21) and "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money" (Matthew 6:24). Jesus looked at the rich man, and He loved him. That's why he challenged him to give away all he had. And Jesus looks at you and at me, and He loves us. He wants us to be generous because He knows generosity safeguards our heart against greed.

Each week during this series, I'm sharing some anonymous testimonies from people within our church family about what God has taught them and how they've grown as they embraced generosity. Evan is going to read three testimonies for us:

#1) Before my wife and I were married, we decided to be faithful with our tithe. Throughout our seven-year marriage, our income has been blessed immensely beyond what we ever thought possible, and we continue to increase our giving as our income increases. However, recently with the busyness of life and a work transition, I dropped the ball. I had been manually giving electronically and kept forgetting to do it. I brought it up to my wife, and we developed a plan to

"catch up," which was around \$5,000. A few days later, we received a tax refund from two years prior for the amount to cover the catch up.

#2) When McBIC had a capital gifts campaign for the construction of our youth center, we made the largest four-year commitment we'd made, planning to take that out of the bonus we received from our business each fall. Business went well that first year, and we paid our commitment out of the bonus. However, the second year, our business really dropped, and we didn't receive a bonus. We thought we would have to take our pledge out of our children's college fund, but just about the time the pledge was due, we received a gift in the exact amount of our pledge from someone who knew nothing about our situation and never before or after gave us that kind of gift. The next two years, we had no problem meeting our pledge. We really thanked God for His faithfulness.

#3) Neither of us grew up in households where there was much talk about money. We knew that our parents gave to the church and to missionaries, but we didn't know how they determined how much to give or where to give it. When we were dating and early in our marriage, we listened regularly to Larry Burkett from Christian Financial Concepts. The lessons we learned together about stewardship of the resources that God entrusted to us have been critical in our understanding of giving, saving, and spending. Learning these together has also allowed us to avoid some of the most common arguments that couples have about money. While we have not always agreed fully on how to allocate our income, we do agree on the underlying principles of living below our means, saving for the future, and giving generously to the church and other causes God lays on our hearts. We did not have substantial financial resources early on, but we learned to give generously from what we had. We learned (and continue to learn) to operate from an abundance mindset rather than a scarcity mindset. I remember a pastor telling us years ago that he and his wife had determined to increase their percentage of giving each time either of them received a raise. This was a good reminder that all of our resources belong to God, and we can become increasingly generous as God is generous with us. Now that we are more established financially, we are in a place to think and

pray about how best to give and invest in people and projects that God has drawn us to. We are finding great joy in the ability to give more than we ever imagined we could to see God's kingdom advanced.

Thanks so much to those of you who shared your story with us. Your personal stories move generosity from a theoretical idea to a living reality for us.

Each week during this series, I'm committed to giving you a McBIC ministry snapshot to demonstrate how the tithes and offerings our church family gives help advance God's kingdom through our local church, in our community and around the world. Every church uses the money their people give to pay their utilities; support the ministry and programming of the church to children, teens and adults; and to pay staff salaries. Those are all important to keep a church running, but I'm especially excited about the ways the money our church family gives goes to support missionaries and ministries outside of our church.

McBIC's vision statement is this: "We are disciples who bring restoration and wholeness to Mechanicsburg and to the world." One of the main ways we seek to bring restoration and wholeness locally and globally is through supporting missionaries and ministries outside of our local church. I hope these numbers help you wrap your minds around how our church family's generosity is making an impact in our community and around the globe.

- We're committed to giving 10% of our church family's giving to BIC Common Ministries. BIC Common Ministries supports church planting, world missions, and strengthening local churches across our denomination. This year, we'll give over \$100,000 to Common Ministries.
- We support 14 local and global ministries that minister outside of our church and four missionary family units. This year, we'll give just under \$50,000 to those 18 ministries and missionaries.
- The missionaries we support are McBIC members who minister in Guatemala and Asia, and two of them do international student ministry on the campuses of Millersville University and the University of North Carolina.

- The ministries we support cover a wide range of focus from caring for the poor in our local community, to orphan care, to ministry to those who have had abortions, to natural disaster crises, to refugee ministry.
- For next year, we're proposing a budget that would increase our giving to outside ministries and missionaries by nearly \$15,000. I'm especially excited that we're significantly increasing our support of missionaries.

As God continues to bless McBIC with his favor, our church board and staff are committed to increasing our support of outside ministries and missionaries, because we believe these ministries and missionaries are pursuing the same goal McBIC has of seeing God's kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven, and we want to lean away from the tendency to focus only on what God is doing in right in front of us.

God's promise throughout the Bible is that as we give generously to Him, He'll bless us and take care of us. I believe that promise applies to us individually and to our church family. Listen to these words from the book of Malachi, where the prophet Malachi is speaking words from God to his people about their failure to give. This is the only place in Scripture where God instructs his people to test Him. "Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it" (Malachi 3:10).

My hope as you've heard this sermon today is that the Holy Spirit is speaking to your heart and reminding you of God's goodness and his love for you. Rather than viewing giving to church and ministry with skepticism, I hope you're able to embrace the important role generosity plays in your growth as a disciple. It was Jesus' heart of love for the rich man in Mark chapter 10 that led Him to ask him to give away everything he had, and it's Jesus' heart of love for us and his desire to protect us from greed that leads Him to desire our generosity. As we give generously and as we cultivate faithful generosity in our church family, McBIC wins, God's kingdom wins, and you and I win as we grow as Jesus' disciples.