

Jumpstarting My Generosity 2 Corinthians 9:6-11

DNA tests have proven conclusive in determining the identity of people, even those who've been dead for years. Archeologists went to Vienna to dig up the grave of Beethoven. When they unearthed the casket and opened it, they found Beethoven holding a copy of the musical score of his famous 5th Symphony. Beethoven had an eraser in his hand and was feverishly erasing the musical score. The archaeologist asked, "What are you doing?" Beethoven looked up and said, "*Why, I'm decomposing.*" Okay, it's a groaner. Yet, periodically some famous person's grave will be unearthed.

In 2012, the remains of King Richard III (**picture**) were unearthed. Since then, British scientists have confirmed the skeleton found buried beneath a car park in London was indeed King Richard III. Richard was killed in battle in the War of the Roses in 1485. The location of his remains had been a mystery until recently. The physical evidence of the curved spine of the skeleton matched descriptions of Richard's scoliosis. But the test that confirmed his identity was DNA. There are two living descendants of Richard's sister, Anne of York, and they provided DNA samples. When their DNA was compared with the DNA from the skeleton, it was a match. DNA can be used to identify a person even hundreds of years after their death.

What's in your DNA? I'm not talking about your physical DNA. Something far more important, your spiritual DNA. If someone started digging into your spiritual life, would they discover your spiritual DNA is a match with Jesus Christ? Are you like Jesus? Turn in your Bible to 2 Corinthians 9:6-11 (p. 968). "*You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way.*" We're saved, so we can go to heaven. We're saved, so we can serve. We're saved, so we can glorify God. We're saved, so we can be generous like Jesus. If you're truly born-again, generosity is in your spiritual DNA.

Every person is known for one of two things – how *generous* he or she is, or how *greedy* he or she is. Think of some people you know, are they known for being generous or greedy? What about you? What would those close to you say? Are you generous or greedy? What would your spouse, siblings or children say? What would God say? Are you generous or greedy?

Truly generous people have fulfilled and joyful lives. Greedy people have empty and unhappy lives. If you listen carefully, in just a few moments, you can often tell if someone is generous or greedy. The truth is most of us tend to be greedy. We have to fight to not be greedy. Greed is part of our fallen, sin-contaminated DNA. It's only regeneration and God's grace that transforms our DNA from a greedy person to a generous one. And we see the evidence of that reality all around us.

How many hospitals have atheists started? Do unsaved people start soup kitchens for the homeless? That's because a mark of truly being born-again is you're a generous person. Sadly, as America becomes more post-Christian, greed is squashing generosity.

Are you generous? Or, does your generosity need a **Jump Start**? Most of us need a **Jump Start** when it comes to generosity. What do you need to fully experience the blessing of generosity? If you're taking notes...

1. You must realize your Heavenly Father owns everything. God is the source of everything, every blessing in your life. What's the source of your income? You may want to say it's your job, but God gave you that job. He owns the company. You may think your source of income is the stock market. God owns the stock market.

Paul says God is the One who supplies the seeds to the sower. That means every good thing in your life is a gift from God. As James 1:17 says, *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."* The Bible says God owns everything worthwhile and valuable in the universe.

We don't own anything; we merely manage things for God for a brief period of time. It's not our money, time or talent. It's all God's. Have you come to a place where you realize God is the source of everything you are and have? It's true and if you get it, it revolutionizes your outlook on life.

If you're tempted to think you earned what you have and it's yours to keep, consider this statement from God's Word, *"You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.' But remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth"*(Deuteronomy 8:17-18). In other words, I don't own a house; I live in a house that belongs to God. You may think, "Doesn't a mortgage company or the bank really own part of your house?" God owns every bank and mortgage company in the world. I don't own a car. I drive a car God owns. I don't own a computer. I use a computer God owns. I don't own my brain; God made it. It belongs to Him. God owns everything, and He has graciously allowed us to manage a portion of it. It ALL belongs to God.

2. God designed us to be generous. When Jesus was asked, "What the greatest commandment was?" He answered, *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself"* (Matthew 22:36-39). It's impossible to love God and your neighbor and be greedy. God designed us to be a channel of His blessing, not a container.

Among waterways, a channel has no other purpose than to connect two other bodies of water. It's not designed to hold water like a reservoir, but to move the water from a source to a destination. God designed you to be a channel through which He blesses others. He doesn't want you to receive His blessings to hoard for yourself. He designed you to pass on His blessings to others. Jesus said, *"If anyone is thirsty, let Him come to me and drink...streams of living water will flow from within him"* (John 7:37-38).

God designed you in His image. His nature is to give. He gave light to a dark world. He gave life to a clump of clay and called him Adam. He gave variety to the world by creating all the amazing animals. He gave His only begotten Son. God is a giver and it's the way He designed us. The Bible says, *"We must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"* (Acts 20:35)

Have you seen the show, *Hoarders?* (**picture**) Some people seem to have a sickness causing them to store and hoard everything until they can't even walk through their houses. Before you're quick to criticize hoarders, you might be the kind of person

hoarding your “life.” Jesus said the fallacy of storing up for this world is that moth and rust can destroy all of it. Thieves can steal it. There’s a better place to store your treasure – Heaven.

Shortly after the end of World War II, Europe began picking up the pieces. Much of the old country had been ravaged by war and was in ruins. Perhaps the saddest sight of all was that of little orphaned children starving in the streets of those war-torn cities. Early on a chilly morning, an American soldier was making his way back to his barracks in London. As he turned the corner in his Jeep, he spotted a little boy with his nose pressed to the window of a pastry shop (**picture**). Inside the baker was kneading dough for a fresh batch of doughnuts. The hungry boy stared in silence, watching every move. The soldier pulled his Jeep to the curb, stopped, got out and walked quietly over to where the little guy was standing. Through the steamed-up window he could see the mouth-watering morsels as they were being pulled from the oven, piping hot. The boy salivated and released a slight groan as he watched the cook place them into the glass-enclosed counter, ever so carefully.

The soldier's heart went out to the nameless orphan as he stood beside him. "Son...would you like some of those?" The boy was startled. "Oh, yeah...I would!" The American stepped inside and bought a dozen, put them in a bag, and walked back to where the boy was standing in the foggy cold of the London morning. He smiled, held out the bag, and said simply, "Here you are." As he turned to walk away, he felt a tug on his coat. He looked back and heard the child ask quietly, "Mister...are you God?" We are never more like God than when we give. *"God so loved the world that He gave..."*

3. We need to jumpstart our generosity in sharing our talents. The synoptic gospels have what's known as the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25 and Luke 19). We won't take time to look at it today. The point I want to make is that God gives every believer gifts and talents. They're not given to us for our own benefit. That's like the bad guy in the story – he buried his talent and was judged for it. Are you burying your talent? Or, are you generously sharing it? It's God who gives us our gifts and abilities. He's blessed each of us with skills and gifts. The key is to use what God has blessed you with and use it for His glory!

Too often we hoard what God has given us. Maybe you don't know what you can do. Have you ever tried? Step out on faith. Tell the Lord, "Lord, here I am! I'm willing to do whatever I can to serve you. Please help me find the places where I can best serve you."

One of the best ways of discerning your gifts is to get involved in a variety of ministry experiences. As you explore different ministry areas, you'll soon discover if you're gifted for these ministries. How do you do that?

Look for those ministries in which you feel the most fulfilled. God doesn't gift you to make you miserable. The wrong person in the wrong place can be a disaster. When we honor the Lord with our talents, we will usually have a sense of fulfillment in doing so. This is an act of worship.

Look for those ministries in which you seem to be the most effective. *Efficiency is doing things right but effectiveness is doing the right things.* If you want to be your best for God, look for ways to use your gifts in an effective manner. It's often best to begin

servicing in areas where you're sure of your strengths. That doesn't mean we shouldn't grow or get stuck. We should though focus where we're most effective.

"If you have a job that requires a pry bar, don't use a screwdriver." In other words certain tools are used for specific jobs. The same goes with the gifts that God has blessed us with. Lead from your strengths.

Look for those ministries in which others affirm your abilities. If you have some questions about whether or not God has called you into a certain area of ministry, ask godly people who you trust. And don't get hung up on that word "ministry." Every believer has been called to minister in one way, shape or form. If you use your gifts to glorify God and it touches lives of people around you, it's a ministry.

4. We need to jumpstart our generosity in sharing our time. Our goal should not be to live a long life, but a life that counts in terms of eternity. For most people, life consists of little more than getting up, going to work, coming home, eating dinner, spending a couple of hours watching TV or being on our phone or the computer, going to bed...repeating that cycle for 40 years or so. Their goal is to save up enough money to retire, buy an RV so they can travel around taking pictures of the National Parks before they die.

That's a wasted life! As believers, we have a higher purpose. Jesus said (Matthew 6:33) we are to seek first His kingdom and righteousness. Whether God grants us a relatively long life or a short one, our focus should be on using the time, abilities and resources He entrusts to us to seek His kingdom.

When you think about the life of Christ, it's amazing that in three short years He chose, trained, and equipped the disciples to carry on what He began. To do that, He had to use His time wisely and rightly.

Ephesians 5:15-16 says, *"Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil."* The word time here is the word *kairos*. It means a specific, appropriate time. I like the translation "opportune time."

On the campus of Wheaton College, there's a sundial in the middle of the campus. Underneath the sundial are inscribed these words. *"It is later than you think"* and it is! The Bible talks about the importance of making the most of every opportunity. There are times in your life when you ought to do certain things. If you don't do them then, you miss the opportunity.

Someone wisely said, *"There are three things that can never be recalled: a spent arrow, a spoken word, and a lost opportunity."* Or, as John Greenleaf Whittier (picture) wrote, *"Of all sad words of tongue and pen the saddest are these it might have been."* We're all victims of missed opportunities. Let's not be victims in the future. **We need to jumpstart our generosity with our time.**

a. Don't miss the opportunity to be saved. Most here today would claim to know Christ. Recently, I was thinking of a Deacon's wife in a church I worked in years ago. Though a professing Christian for decades, in middle age, she admitted, "I really don't know Jesus" and was gloriously saved.

Please don't miss the opportunity to be saved! There's a passage in Isaiah which is both encouraging and frightening at the same time, Isaiah 55:6. It says, *"Seek the Lord*

while He may be found; call on Him while He is near.” The encouraging part of that is that the Lord can be found and the Lord is near. The frightening part of that verse is it implies there’s a time when God can’t be found and when He won’t be near. There’s an opportune time for you to call upon the Lord to be saved, but there’s a time when that opportunity will be gone. It’s a “limited time offer.” You can blow it off until later, if you know for sure when you’re going to die...but you don’t. ***Don’t miss the opportunity to be saved.***

b. Don’t miss the opportunity to spend time with Jesus. As many of you know, Jane has been gone this past week for her annual trek to Texas to spend time with her parents. We either talk, text or email nearly every day. *Why?* We love each other. If you love someone, you spend time with them.

We talked about this last week, so we won’t spend much time here. About the most important thing you can do every day is spend time in the Bible and let Jesus speak to you. Then pray, and speak to Jesus. You have to make it a priority or it won’t happen. You have to schedule it or it won’t happen. I’d suggest you spend time in the Word and prayer in the same place and time each day. Make it a date. Most of us when we have a breakfast date, we keep that date. Make a daily date with Jesus and it will help you keep it.

c. Don’t miss the opportunity to spend time with and serve your forever family. Remember we started out with we are either greedy or generous. Hear me and hear me well – miserable people are greedy with their time. Joyful, fulfilled ones are generous with theirs. So do you know what greedy miserable people do? Do you know how they think? *“The reason I’m miserable is that I need more time for ME!”* Wrong answer!

We’re taught by a pagan world to spend time on me, then my family. That results in a life of misery, not to mention it’s a sin. Even in the church, we worship at the “altar of me” or the “family altar” where we worship our family. We need to be committed to our family. It’s a thin line though between being committed to your family whether it’s your spouse or children, or grandchildren – and idolatry.

Find a place to do significant service for the Lord by serving others. A wise way to do that is to serve and invest generationally. We have some folk at Grace who get it! I’ll just mention one. Dave Thompson teaches our Sr Hi SML but his kids are all grown. There are others who consistently invest in children here at Grace though they have no children in our programs. It’s greed when we only invest when it benefits us.

We have something a little frightening going on at Grace right now – our nursery isn’t full. It’s another reason we must build. This facility is not “kid friendly.” If you have grandchildren, please bring them to church. Give their parents a break (bring them too) but invest generationally. Children help us cultivate the fruit of Spirit. Mark it down. Greedy, grumpy people don’t like kids. If you don’t love children, it says something sad about your heart.

Do you want a fulfilled life? Jumpstart your generosity with your time with your brothers and sisters in Christ. So how are you spending your time? Did you know the average American between TV, smart phone and Internet spends 11 hours a day using electronic media? But we don’t have any time for our brothers and sisters in Christ? Really?

We need to ask: Is the way I'm spending my time going to matter 10 years from now? 100 years from now? In eternity? It can. You must choose now to be generous with the time God has entrusted to you.

5. We need to jumpstart our generosity in sharing our treasure. Remember the news story about Martin Shkreli (**picture**)? Last fall it came out that he purchased the rights to a 62-year-old drug used for treating AIDS patients. He immediately raised the price from \$13.50 per tablet to \$750. A drug which costs roughly \$1 to produce was increased to \$750 per tablet.

We think how cruel, how heartless! But if you have AIDS, you'll just die physically. What's God's primary tool for sharing the Gospel? The local church. Yet, most Bible-believing churches, like our church, limp along because God's people have not learned to be generous.

The Lord Jesus is the embodiment of generosity. He left the splendor and glory of heaven to come to this earth, not as a mighty king, but as the lowly baby of the stable in Bethlehem. He gave Himself as the sacrifice for our sins. *"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich"* (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Generous givers are invariably people of faith. You have to trust God to be able to give away money you easily could spend on yourself. People of faith are people of prayer, because it's through prayer that we receive from God's bountiful supply. Generous givers are blessed because they're freed from the deadly sin of greed. They're being conformed to the likeness of Jesus, and have deep, enduring relationships with others. Scripture repeatedly reminds us that generous givers are blessed because they will reap eternal rewards.

Please understand, heaven is not the reward for being a giver. Heaven is God's free gift, based on Christ's giving Himself on the cross. But those who have received God's gift of eternal life will reap rewards in heaven in proportion to their stewardship of money in this life. Unlike our investments in this uncertain world, which can be lost in a market crash, our investments in heaven are secure from every source of loss.

How can you put a price on an investment that yields eternal dividends? If you give to further the Lord's work, you'll someday be welcomed into eternal dwellings by friends who are there because you gave (Luke 16:1-9).

Let me share a wonderful story of that. Years ago, a lady was filling a box for missionaries in India. A child came to her door to give her a penny, all that the child had, to be used for the Lord. With this coin, the missionary bought a tract and put it into the box. Eventually, this gospel leaflet came into the hands of a Burmese chief, and God used it to bring him to salvation. The chief told the story of his conversion to his friends, and many of them believed in Christ and threw away their idols. They built a church there, sent out a missionary, and at least 1,500 natives were converted. All this, and probably more, resulted from a little girl's gift of one penny for Jesus.

Some of you don't give at all. Please start. You're missing out on partnering with God and His blessing. Some don't give because they're in debt...for various reasons. Think about this. If you don't give now because your finances are a wreck, do you think God is going to give you more?

God is not the federal government. If I lent my car to a friend and he wrecked it or brought it back with no gas and it looked like he'd taken it off-roading, I'd think twice before I'd lend him my again. God will bless you if you're generous.

What God desires is for us to trust Him. This is very un-American. In America, when we give, we typically give out of our excess. God wants us to trust Him and give in faith, even when we don't think we can afford it.

Are you generous or greedy? **We need to jumpstart our generosity with our treasure.** This is an area we all struggle with. We'd love to help you grow here. If you'll promise to read it, note it on your Connection Card and we'll give you this book, *The Treasure Principle (picture)* by Randy Alcorn.

6. We need to jumpstart our generosity in sharing our testimony. What's the most important thing that's ever happened in your life? If you're a Christian, I hope you think it's when you came to Christ.

Think of all the other things that we share as part of our life story...yet somehow we don't share that Someone died for us and we're completely forgiven, and we've got this new Home. But we rarely, if ever, tell anyone? Does that make any sense?

Please be generous in sharing Jesus. Every one of us knows family and friends, co-workers and neighbors who don't know Jesus. God gives us opportunities to share the gospel with them. How many times do we miss those opportunities? The vast majority of us came to know Christ because someone shared the Good News with us. Are you doing the same thing? The biblical model and the best way to see people come to Christ is by each of us sharing our faith one-on-one.

So what do you share? Your story...your testimony. It's the one you're most familiar with. How you came to Christ? How you know you're forgiven? How you know you're going to heaven?

Last week I had the privilege of leading a man to Christ. I've had that privilege many times. I've led several folk in our church to the Lord. Most of the folk I've led to the Lord already knew the basics of the gospel. They were what Jesus called "*close to the Kingdom.*"

I'm convinced though that one reason most Christians never lead someone to the Lord is they never ask two key questions. 1) Have you ever trusted Christ as your personal Lord and Savior? 2) Would you like to do that right now? We never bring the person to the point of decision. We're scared of offending them or losing a friend. Do you think if they go into a Christless eternity, they're going to think nice, friendly thoughts about you?

So ask the question. Don't barrel through with it or force it. Yet, with the leading of the Spirit, encourage them to come to a decision. Because no decision, tragically is a decision.

What about you? Have you ever trusted Christ as your personal Lord and Savior? Would you like to do that right now? How do we receive God's gift of salvation? Simply by asking for it. Do you know in your heart that you want Christ in your life? You may have Him today. Admit you're a sinner. Trust that Jesus died for all of your sin. This is the wonder of the gospel. If you want to be saved, remember these four words: *Run to the cross!*

Run to the cross and lay hold of Jesus Christ who loved you and died for you. God is fully satisfied with the work of His Son. Remember *“the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”* Do you believe that? If you have any stirring in your heart, any sense of your need, any desire to be saved by grace, that desire has been placed in your heart by God. Now the rest is up to you. Run to the cross, run to Jesus where Jesus waits to meet you.

Are you a Christian? Are you sharing your faith? There’s nothing more important you can do than to help a person come to know Christ. James 5:20 *“Remember this: Whoever turns a sinner away from his error will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.”*

Dr. James Stewart, professor of New Testament at the University of Edinburgh, described what he thought the greatest threat to the church is. He said, *“It is not communism, atheism, or materialism; the greatest threat is Christians trying to sneak into heaven incognito without ever sharing their faith.”*

If I was your neighbor and saw your house was on fire, and you didn’t know it, what would be the kindest, most loving thing I could do? I’d run to your door and warn you to get out quickly—your house is burning! We know there is a heaven and we know there’s a hell. We have a sacred obligation to lovingly warn others about the danger of eternal judgement. I fear hell will be populated with people who ask for all eternity, “Why didn’t _____ warn me about this?” We have an obligation to share the gospel with them. It should be something we do gladly and eagerly because Jesus has saved us, and we love Him. **We need to jumpstart our generosity in sharing our testimony.**

Conclusion: This is so important, I want you to remember this. Most of us, probably all of us, need a jumpstart when it comes to generosity.

Let me attempt to illustrate greed and generosity this morning. (Give out small candy bars to about a third of the congregation), keeping most of them for myself to show greed and stinginess. Then, after going through the congregation, make the point, return and give everyone one or two.

For those of you who didn’t get anything, do you think I’m generous? How about those of you who got one? Honestly, was I truly generous? No, I’ve still got most of the candy bars. Think about how you feel. Then, think about how God must feel, the One who gave everything for us – when we are greedy instead of generous like Him.

Everyone is known and will be known for one of two things – how *generous* he or she was...or how *greedy* he or she was.

What about you? What would those close to you say, who really know you? Are you generous or greedy? What does the Lord say about you? Are you generous or are you greedy? **Four thoughts** and we’re done.

1. Generous believers experience deep satisfaction in knowing they are participating in God’s priorities. God is a giving God and He wants to use us to distribute His gifts to others.

2. Generous believers find great joy in giving. Some of the happiest people you’ll ever meet are people who love to give. Some of the grouchiest ones are those who are greedy. If you find your joy waning, look for ways to become a giver. To be “*more blessed*” means to become more joyful.

3. Generous believers are thankful they're in a position to give. Those who practice the joy of giving recognize everything they have is a gift from God. As they give some of it away, they're reminded that it's not really theirs in the first place. Many of you can testify that the more you give, the more God gives to you, which allows you to give even more.

4. Generous believers will always be rewarded. When we give, we experience rewards right now, and we know that according to Matthew 6:20 we're also storing up treasures in heaven.

Our Heavenly Father is generous...do we act like Him? Are we generous with our talents, time, treasure and testimony? I want to be like Jesus. Don't you? Are you generous? Do you have God's DNA?