

**Graphics, Audio and Video - Media Notes are highlighted in this background**

- Please record sermon at both worship services

**Key Questions**

1. What is this sermon about?
  - a. This sermon is about the paradox of generosity with our finances and time.
2. Why is this sermon important?
  - a. This sermon is important because living a life of generosity is meaningful and fulfilling, yet we find ourselves in a society that encourages the opposite.
3. What are the next action steps?
  - a. Live generously
4. What is the good news (bottom line)?
  - a. The good news is that we follow a generous God.

**Context**

This is the fourth sermon in the series, Restoring Joy: 5 Habits for Living Well. In this series we explore five important lessons the Bible teaches us about living well and experiencing real joy.

This sermon has been prepared with the help of Finding Joy in Real Life: 5 Habits for Living Well sermon series at The United Methodist Church of the Resurrection which was April 14 to May 19, 2013. More information about this series can be found online at <http://j.mp/1mRQf4f>.

**Metadata**

- Topic(s)
  - Generosity
- Books of the Bible
  - Luke
- Series
  - Restoring Joy: 5 Habits for Living Well
- Tags
  - generosity, stewardship, life, finances, graduation, greed, priorities, giving, money

## Luke 12:13-21, CEB

13 Someone from the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”

14 Jesus said to him, “Man, who appointed me as judge or referee between you and your brother?”

15 Then Jesus said to them, “Watch out! Guard yourself against all kinds of greed. After all, one’s life isn’t determined by one’s possessions, even when someone is very wealthy.” 16 Then he told them a parable: “A certain rich man’s land produced a bountiful crop. 17 He said to himself, What will I do? I have no place to store my harvest! 18 Then he thought, Here’s what I’ll do. I’ll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. That’s where I’ll store all my grain and goods. 19 I’ll say to myself, You have stored up plenty of goods, enough for several years. Take it easy! Eat, drink, and enjoy yourself. 20 But God said to him, ‘Fool, tonight you will die. Now who will get the things you have prepared for yourself?’ 21 This is the way it will be for those who hoard things for themselves and aren’t rich toward God.”

## Response to Scripture

One: The Word of God for the people of God.

All: **Thanks be to God!**

## Sermon Starter Video

- Play sermon starter video, if available.
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## Introduction

This is the fourth of a series of five sermons about some of the most important lessons of the Bible. During this series we have been focusing on those simple habits and practices that can restore joy in our life and help us experience life that really is life.

## Sermon Notes and Scripture Study

I invite you to open your bulletin to a place where you can take notes during the message today. Today, I hope that you will hear:

- Something new or find new questions
- Perspective on your life or something in your life that gives additional meaning to the message today.
- Guidance about how to live as a disciple of Jesus.

I want to remind you of where we have been in the series so far and invite you to write some of these things down as well.

- **Treat people in the same way that we want people to treat us.**

- In the first week of this series we took a closer look at the golden rule - Jesus' command to treat people in the same way that you want people to treat you. The good news is that God makes it possible through God's grace to actually do this, we *can* treat people in the same way that we want people to treat us.
- **Do justice, embrace love and walk humbly with God.**
  - The next week we considered God's requirements for our life to do justice, embrace love and humbly walk with God every day. These are more important than our religious practices.
- **Ask for and offer forgiveness**
  - Last week, the focus was on asking for, offering and receiving forgiveness from others and God. The good news is that Jesus came to save us from our sins and makes it possible for us to receive forgiveness
- **The Secret to True Wealth**
- **The Greatest Commandment** - Next week we will conclude our series with the Greatest Commandment of all.

Sometimes we can overlook these practices as they are simple and clear, yet they are essential to our life of faith. Today we focus on generosity and how this practice can bring perspective in our life, help us make a difference in the lives of others and restore joy.

I invite you to write down some of the things that you hear in the sermon today and take your bulletin home as a tool to grow in your faith outside of worship. You can reflect on what you heard today, pray for people of our congregation and read scripture to prepare for worship next week.

### Opening Prayer

Will you pray with me? O God, use these words to speak good news so that as individuals and as a congregation we will fear nothing but sin, desire nothing but you and live as part of your kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

### Opening Story - The Mine-O-Saur

Soon after we moved to El Dorado, we were encouraged to make sure and sign our children up for Dolly Parton's Imagination Library. This is a fantastic program available here in El Dorado in which every child under age 6 receives a high-quality age-appropriate book mailed to their home. This is one of the books which we received recently - The Mine-O-Saur.

I wanted to share a little bit of it with you this morning. Here are a few pages:

"One morning, before Mrs. Raptor rang the bell...

... But the Mine-o-saur yelled, "I don't care! They're MINE! MINE! MINE!"<sup>1</sup>

At times, it seems that society and the culture around us encourages us to live this way.

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<sup>1</sup> Sudipta Bardhan-Quallen and David Clark. *The Mine-o-saur*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2007.

The idea is that we want to get as much money as we can, hold on to much as much stuff as we can and spend as much on ourselves as we can. The formula seems to go like this:

Wealth = Money and Possessions = Happiness

Just like the Mine-O-Saur.

By the end of the book, the Mine-O-Saur discovers that friends are more valuable than things. He brings back all of the things that he has taken from the other dinosaurs. They can't believe it. Here are a few more pages:

The dinos looked at each other. "Isn't this YOUR stuff?" asked the Stegosaurus...  
... You don't know how this makes me feel - My friends! You're MINE!"<sup>2</sup>

The Mine-O-Saur learns the lesson that having stuff is not what life is all about. The secret to true wealth is a life of generosity and we find the truth of generosity is a paradox.

## The Generosity Paradox

### Research

Last year two researchers from the University of Notre Dame, Christian Smith and Hilary Davidson, published an article about their work on generosity and they describe the generosity paradox in this way:

"Generosity is paradoxical. Those who give, receive back in turn. By spending ourselves for others' well-being, we enhance our own. In letting go of some of what we own, we better secure our own lives. By giving ourselves away, we ourselves move toward greater flourishing. This is not only a philosophical or religious teaching, it is a sociological fact."<sup>3</sup>

### Rich Man's Possessions

In the scripture passage for today we see the generosity paradox in reverse. In warning against greed, Jesus tells the story of a rich man whose land had produced an amazing crop - more than he could possibly use. His first response was to be anxious about it - he didn't have enough room to store all the grain! He decided to build bigger barns to store all of his grain and goods and then kick back and relax for a couple years. "But God said to him, 'Fool, tonight you will die. Now who will get the things you have prepared for yourself?'"<sup>4</sup> At the end of his life, the rich man could not take his possessions with him. What was the point?

### The Generosity Paradox in Reverse

The situation for the rich man is the generosity paradox in reverse, which Smith and

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<sup>2</sup> Sudipta Bardhan-Quallen and David Clark. *The Mine-o-saur*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> "The Generosity Paradox: By Giving We Receive, But By Taking We Lose." Co.Exist. Accessed May 14, 2014.

<http://www.fastcoexist.com/1681158/the-generosity-paradox-by-giving-we-receive-but-by-taking-we-lose>.

<sup>4</sup> Luke 12:20, CEB.

Davidson describe in this way:

**"By grasping onto what we currently have, we lose out on better goods that we might have gained. In keeping to ourselves what we possess, we diminish its long-term value to us. ... In short, by failing to care for others, we do not properly take care of ourselves. It is no coincidence that the word "miser" is etymologically related to the word "miserable."<sup>5</sup>**

The more we give away, the more significance and meaning we experience in our life. The more that we seek to keep to ourselves, beyond our basic needs, the further away we move from life that really is life.

### Transition

We most often talk about generosity when we are talking about our finances. Our relationship with money and approach to generosity is something that continues to develop throughout our entire lives.

## The Generosity Paradox with Money

Today we are celebrating our graduates. This is a season where people are graduating from high school, college and universities across the country. One of the most common questions that graduates get asked is, "What are you going to do now?"

### What's next after graduation?

I heard the story of a grandparent who asked a grandson who was graduating from high school - Now that you are getting ready to graduate, what are your dreams for the future? The student answered, I have always had the dream of:

Graduate	Grandparent
Going to four-year university.	That's wonderful, it is so great that you will be able to fulfill your dream. What is your dream after that?
Going to graduate school, maybe out of state and getting my graduate degree	Fantastic. What is your dream after that?
I would like to work for a big company and having a great career.	That's wonderful, what is your dream after that?
This may sound strange, but I dream of making pretty good money	Sounds good. What is your dream after that?

<sup>5</sup> "The Generosity Paradox: By Giving We Receive, But By Taking We Lose." Co.Exist. Accessed May 14, 2014.

<http://www.fastcoexist.com/1681158/the-generosity-paradox-by-giving-we-receive-but-by-taking-we-lose>.

Well, I guess I'll get married and have kids.	Okay, that's good. What else?
I dream of having a big house one day. I drive through some nice neighborhoods and think, I would like to live in one of those houses one day.	Okay, what's next.
Well, secretly, I have always thought a 7 series BMW would be really cool.	Well, that's a dream. Then what?
I suppose I would want to retire early and travel the world with my wife.	So, what do you dream of after that?
I guess I don't have any dreams after that.	Son, your dreams are way, way too small.

What the grandparent knew that the young man did not yet know is that you can have all of those things and not find meaning or life. Often, the moment that you get them you already start thinking about the next thing that you need to get - a new model comes out, a tv that is 10 inches bigger than the one that you have. You can find yourself chasing things your whole life that will end up in the trash in the end and missed out on what life is really supposed to be.

### Life ≠ Possessions

This is what Jesus teaches us in the scripture for today, from **Luke 12:15**

**15 Then Jesus said to them, "Watch out! Guard yourself against all kinds of greed. After all, one's life isn't determined by one's possessions, even when someone is very wealthy."**

This is a lesson that we have to learn about being generous with our finances. It is not that having money or possessions is wrong, it's just that if you think this is what life is all about you have completely missed the point. One's life isn't determined by one's possessions.

### Transition

There are times when are our hearts are moved and our finances follow our heart. Yet there are also times when the act of generosity itself shapes our hearts.

### Conclusion

#### Call to Action

In **Luke 12:34**, Jesus says, **"Where your treasure is, there your heart will be too."** Jesus does not say your treasure will go where your heart is. "One of the best ways to become a truly generous person is simply to start behaving like one." Right attitudes often do follow right actions. New beliefs and insights are frequently provoked by new behaviors and instigation of habits. Like many things in life, we usually learn by doing, we perfect activities and attitudes by

practicing them. ... People certainly can learn generosity, can come to personally believe in, and practice real generosity, by first simply setting into motion new behaviors that are generous and then reflecting upon and soaking in their meaning and consequences.”<sup>6</sup>

## Good News

The good news is that through generosity we can tangibly be part of what God is doing in the world. God has created us to live generous lives. Every dollar that you give to the church goes to support our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Even more important than that, I invite you to live generously because it is essential to who we are as human beings.

## Congregation of Philanthropists

One of my dreams as your pastor is to cultivate a congregation of 200 people who are all philanthropists - at whatever financial level you find yourself. That you see yourself as blessed to be a blessing and you look at your finances and ask, How can I do something with this? Instead of, what can I buy with this? When you get a raise or a bonus to consider, how can I make a difference with this?

## Invitation

St. Francis of Assisi captures this idea in a line in his famous prayer: *For it is in giving that we receive*. When we live generously we find, meaning, significance and the secret to true wealth.

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<sup>6</sup> "The Generosity Paradox: By Giving We Receive, But By Taking We Lose." Co.Exist. Accessed May 14, 2014.  
<http://www.fastcoexist.com/1681158/the-generosity-paradox-by-giving-we-receive-but-by-taking-we-lose>.