



CANYON HILLS

COMMUNITY CHURCH

Series: The Book of Mark

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The Heart of Generosity

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We have worshiped God with our singing, our prayers, and our giving, and now we're going to worship God in his Word. While you're preparing to give, let's get our Bibles open quickly to the gospel of Mark, chapter 12. Recently, I read of a church that took a survey of all the believers in their church and asked them what topic they wanted to hear the preacher preach on. Just so you know, we will never take a survey like that here. Just don't even get your hopes up about that happening.

This church found out that the two least-mentioned topics about which people wanted to hear a sermon were hell and giving. Which one do you think was dead last? Giving, which is kind of weird, right? We'd rather hear about the horrors of hell instead of the joy of giving. That says a lot.

I think it's probably because hell, for Christians, is at least supposed to be typically a topic that applies to somebody else, but the topic of giving, stewardship, money, or tithing applies to all of us. I think probably more on a practical level, the reason it ranks last is because of how we would feel if we invited someone to come to church that day. Isn't that just the luck? The day you invite someone to come to church, the topic is money and giving. That's totally embarrassing and completely humiliating and uncomfortable.

Well, today, we come to that place in the gospel of Mark, and it's the subject of Christian giving and generosity. We're working our way through the gospel of Mark, verse by verse, and I want to share with you some of the essential biblical principles about our stewardship of money.

Now, before we step all the way in, I need you to hear me say I love you. You don't hear me say that enough. I believe I'm speaking for all of our pastors and elders when I say that to you. You see, as your servant leaders in the church, when we say to you that we love you, we're saying we are committed to praying for you, and we do, very often. We're saying we're committed to equipping you to serve our Savior.

When we say we love you, we're saying we're not going to let you go on sinning and then just pretend like everything is okay. We're not going to let you destroy your life or the life of your loved ones and just act like nothing is wrong. We love you too much to do that. When we say we love you, we're saying we're committed to encouraging you to trust God and have faith in God.

We're saying to you, when we say we love you, that we will never compromise the truth of God's Word under the pressures of the fear of man. Certainly, this topic fits into that category for sure. Today, Jesus is going to teach us about living a sacrificially generous life. If your Bibles are ready and you're open to Mark, chapter 12, let's stand for the reading of God's Word as we always do, just out of sheer respect that this is God speaking to us through the Holy Spirit-inspired pens of God's people. We left off in verse 41.

"And he [Jesus] sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. And he called his disciples to him and said to them, 'Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.'"

Father in heaven, I pray that you will help this to make sense to us in our day. I pray in the name of your Son, Jesus, and in the power and presence of your Holy Spirit who is here right now, that you would open our hearts, minds, and thinking to what true generosity really is. God, I pray that we would learn, grow, and change today.

God, I pray for those whose hearts are heavy. A topic like this seems so unimportant right now compared to what the people all around us might be facing, God. I pray you would surprise them even still with an overwhelming measure of your comfort and peace. O God, convince them you are right here right now. You are on your throne and you will walk with them every step going forward. We trust you for this to be true. In Christ's name, amen.

I absolutely love this widow in Mark, chapter 12. We don't even know her name. She had no idea the very Son of God was watching her that day. Not only was he watching her, but he was making her a divine example of sacrificial, generous giving for all eternity. What's interesting about this widow is we never hear of her again. She never comes up in Scripture again. This is it. This is the only time we meet her. I would suspect that if Jesus has heroes, she's one of them. She would be an actual hero of Jesus. Here are some of the things we learn from her example and from Jesus pointing her out.

1. *Our giving really matters to our Savior.* It really does. The one who sacrificed his life watches our generosity. He watches our giving. In verses 41 and 42, we find Jesus deliberately staring at the people putting their offerings in the offering boxes. He's not hiding. He's not whispering in the shadows. In fact, he's actually close enough to see the exact amount of their giving.

To make this seem even more uncomfortable to our sensibilities, he's making judgment on the hearts of God's people solely based on their giving that day. He's actually judging their hearts

right on the spot based on one offering. Why is that? Why does this matter so much to Jesus? Let's get personal. Let's get practical.

A. *Generous Christians have to trust God.* We have to trust God in order to be generous in giving. Jesus is teaching a really valuable lesson to his disciples right here. He's showing that all Christian generosity actually begins with a change of heart toward God, not necessarily with a change of heart toward money. The heart has to change first toward God.

According to Jesus, this woman is a giant of the faith, and his description of her is one of reverence and respect. He's in awe of her. She has no idea he's watching her, but what she's doing right here can only be explained by her genuine belief that God loves her and that she trusts him to take care of her. That's what Jesus is noticing here.

Ultimately, this is what our giving says about us. Our giving is a picture of what we think about God. Jesus looks at her and says, "Whoa! What must she believe about her God?" It's amazing. Our giving, church, is directly proportionate to our trust in God.

That's why Jesus says, in Matthew, chapter 6, "Don't be anxious about tomorrow. Your heavenly Father knows what you need. Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and he will take care of your needs." Jesus knows that about God. He believes that about God and he looks at this woman and says, "She believes that. There's the evidence." She trusted that God would do that.

B. *Generous Christians are not required to be rich.* He wants his disciples to know that. Wealth is not a prerequisite to generosity. This widow is in extreme poverty. Doesn't that make the story even more amazing? Right now, we're learning how to be generous from what might be the poorest person we'll ever meet in the New Testament. We're learning right now about giving and generosity from the poorest person we meet in the New Testament. That alone is amazing.

You see, the biggest barrier to being generous is not financial troubles. The biggest barrier to being generous is actually prosperity. That's why Scripture and Jesus spend so much time warning those who are financially better off to be generous, or they're going to, as the Bible says, fall into many harmful temptations and maybe even wander away from the faith altogether.

One of the ways Jesus constantly taught, while he was here on this earth, to avoid the temptations of this world is to make sure you're generous. See, my observation is that a lot of Christians think they can't afford to give. Yet here's the truth. If we don't find a way to give in less than ideal circumstances, the odds are we will give little or nothing when those circumstances change for the better, when all of our finances are perfect, flowing, and abundant. I think that's why Jesus spends so much time talking about this.

2. *Our giving really matters to each other.* At the heart of our giving is this dual accountability, not only just to God, but to our fellow believers, to one another right here all around us. I think our temptation is to push back on that a little bit.

My natural inclination is to say, "Hey, I'm accountable to God. Keep your nose out of my business. Especially keep your nose out of my money business." I know you guys are way too spiritual to ever have that thought, but that's the natural inclination I have. "When it comes to that, hey, just hold it off right there." I think that's probably natural to more of us than we're willing to admit.

I want you to notice something in this story. Jesus doesn't just watch and judge for himself. In verse 43, he calls his disciples over to him and he tells them all about the giving of these people who just put their offerings in. We get a little weird at this point in the story. We get weird about this principle, and in our heads, we immediately run to Matthew, chapter 6, verse 3, where Jesus says, "When it comes to your giving, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret." Do you remember that verse?

The topic comes up and we're like, "Whoa, we can't talk about that. I can't talk about my giving. It's supposed to be a secret!" We actually take that verse even further and say, "Don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. We shouldn't even know what we're giving. That's how secret it should be." I don't know how in the world you do that, but we can take it that far in our heads.

Let me just fix something for us here. The reason Jesus said that is in the verse right above it. In Matthew 6, verse 2, Jesus is saying, **"...sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others."** Jesus is addressing the hypocrisy of certain people of God who give in order to be admired by others.

Jesus is teaching in that moment, saying if you're giving, waving your offering around, saying "Hey, look at me. Look how great I am," something starts to smell really rotten about your giving because the giving we give is really supposed to be a flag waving around, saying, "Look how trustworthy my God is!" So, I don't think we have to run to that verse, "Don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing," and say, "We can't even talk about this!" No, that's not the spirit of that teaching at all.

You see, when we're encouraging each other in our faith, we shouldn't be so reluctant to talk about giving, just like we do when we're trying to encourage each other in our faith and we ask each other, "Hey, how are you doing in your prayer time? How are you doing in your Bible reading? How are you doing in your love, purity, or forgiveness? How are you doing in those areas?"

Just like we do that, we shouldn't be afraid. We should be just as comfortable to say, "Hey, how are you doing in the discipleship of your giving?" We should be comfortable doing that. After all, Jesus talks way more about money, possessions, and stuff than he does about all those other things, right? He talks more about money, stuff, possessions, and how we're supposed to deal with that as children of God than he does about us praying to God. So, let's quit being so uptight about the subject in general.

It really matters to each other. It should matter to each other. Why does it matter so much to Jesus? It's because he knows where our treasure is, our hearts will be also. Our hearts always follow our treasure. What is Jesus saying about this widow that day? Wow! Look at her heart.

Paul certainly models this for us as this being how comfortable we ought to be talking about it. In 2 Corinthians, chapters 8 and 9, Paul is trying to encourage the Corinthians to grow in their discipleship of giving. He does it by telling them about the giving of the Macedonian Christians a couple of cities over, saying, "Hey, those guys aren't half as well-off as you guys over here in Corinth, and they're begging for the opportunity to give to help the saints in Jerusalem."

He looks at the Corinthians and he says, "Don't embarrass me when I come to you and ask you for an offering. I want you to be encouraged by them. They're giving more than they even should. Look at their example." Paul talks about it, and he compares them to others!

Don't you find it just a little bit curious that the very first incident of church discipline in the New Testament, first-century church was regarding lying about giving? Do you remember? In Acts, chapter 5, Ananias and Sapphira come to church and they bring their offerings. Peter says, "Why are you lying about what you're giving? Why are you lying to the Holy Spirit and to God about your offering?" and the two of them drop dead, right on the spot.

I'm just saying, it's right there. I didn't make that up! That's the very first time we see church discipline in the church, and two people die because they lied about what they put in the offering bucket.

3. *Our giving is always judged by the sacrifice, not the amount.* This is what separates Christian generosity from much of what the world calls generous. The wealthy weren't generous that day when Jesus was watching. They weren't generous at all in any way. Large amounts are not necessarily a measurement of faith and trust in God. It says in verse 44 that they gave from their abundance. They gave what was left over. It cost them very little. Jesus is saying, in fact, it didn't cost them anything.

Here's what we know. Sacrifice always comes from the heart. Amount always comes from the checkbook. Generosity comes from the heart, and that's what Jesus is noticing here. He was deeply moved by her sacrifice and unimpressed with their lack of it. Her faith and sacrifice transcended even her own needs. Jesus understands that kind of giving.

So, the question that is raised for us today is...*How could this widow give so much when she had so little?* Look again at verse 44. **"For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."** Here again, more practical and closer to home, is what we learn from her example.

A. *Generous Christians have to have a loose grip on our money.* You see, if you struggle with giving, if you worry about giving, you have one of two relationships to money. You either love it too much or you fear not having it too much. You fear running out of it too much. Both of those are not healthy. Both of those are not Christian.

See, Augustine said, a long time ago, that God is always trying to give good things to his children, but our hands are typically too full to receive them. We're clenching, holding on too tight to everything we might have. Maybe money is at the top of that list. Jesus is showing us here that the blessing in giving comes from the sacrifice. We have to have a loose grip on it.

It reminds me of the farmer whose friend was concerned about the farmer's lack of generosity. One day, the friend said to the farmer, "Hey, if you had \$200, would you give \$100 to the Lord?" The farmer quickly replied, "You bet! I sure would!" The guy said, "Okay, if you had two cows, would you give one cow to the Lord?" The farmer quickly, again, said, "Absolutely! You know I would do that. I would give an extra cow to the Lord."

The friend said, "Okay, well, if you had two pigs, would you give one of the pigs to the Lord?" The farmer said, "Ah, that's not fair. You know I have two pigs." See, it's easy to think we're generous until we have an opportunity to be so.

John MacArthur said it something like this: "God made all of his creation to give. He made the sun, the moon, the stars, the clouds, the earth, the plants to give. He also designed his supreme creation, man, to give. But fallen man is the most reluctant giver in all of God's creation."

Here's the sad truth for the church today. Unfortunately, statistics say, over and over again (and I don't think these statistics lie), that half of the people who call themselves believers never give. Zero. That would mean that 50 percent of us sitting in this church today, if that statistic holds true, don't give, ever. That is a sad indicator of an epidemic lack of trust in God.

Worse than that is half of the remaining 50 percent, 25 percent of the church, give, but they give so little and so inconsistently that it's negligible to the work of the gospel. They give. It's \$25 here, \$100 there, or whatever. It's just random. There's no thought, pattern, or heart behind it. Probably most surprising and most devastating of all is that fewer than 10 percent give 10 percent to their church. Christian generosity begins with a loose grip on stuff.

B. Generous Christians are not immune to difficult circumstances. I don't know about you, but the life I live in this real world is usually in the midst of a lot of unexpected trials and tribulations. It seems like life is continually throwing unexpected things at us, isn't it? It just seems like it comes in waves when we don't expect it.

Medical bills, relationship stress, car troubles, kids needing braces, aging parents, problems at work, computer meltdowns... You name it. It seems like we go through these seasons where everything is okay, and then all of a sudden, it's just like this tidal wave of things needing, breaking, fixing, and struggling.

I don't know about you, but my car never breaks down in my driveway. It always breaks down in the intersection. That's just life. That's real life. You see, at the heart of true Christian generosity is a commitment that circumstances will not dictate my faith and trust in God's goodness to take care of us. That's what Jesus is noticing about her. I know unexpected circumstances do pop up,

and they will dictate the amount of my generosity, but circumstances should never dictate the presence of my generosity. It should never dictate the existence of it.

Practically speaking, when Tammi and I got married, we made a lifelong commitment. Of course, that first commitment was that we would stay married to each other forever, but we also made another lifelong commitment. It's kind of weird, but we talked about this before we got married.

We made a commitment in our giving, in our stewardship. We committed that the very first payment, check, or bill we would pay would be to give God what belongs to God. There were many times along the way where that really, really tested our faith, but I want to testify to you that every single time, God passed the test.

C. Generous Christians don't always make sense. Sacrificial generosity is not practical. It's sacrificial. That's what makes it generous. This widow could have used the money on so many other important things, but she didn't. She didn't let those things stop her from trusting God and faithfully giving.

This is not a story about a widow who came to church that day, gave her offering, and then went home and starved to death. That's not what happening here and that's not what Jesus is teaching. It's not a story about a widow who gave her offering and then became homeless and lived under a bridge somewhere. That is not what's going on in this story.

Jesus is marveling at how she had such a commitment to be generous and faithful that any discretionary money she might have had if she hadn't given, she gave it. She could have kept that money and just bought a bunch of other things that probably were really important to her, but she gave.

When she happened to give, she didn't have a lot of extra money after that. She wasn't starving. She wasn't homeless. Jesus was just recognizing how much she was trusting God in her circumstances. I would say to you that in so many ways, she was less worried and less stressed about money than all the wealthy people in the story.

Wrap your head around that. That day at the offering, I would bet that woman walked away from church having way less worry and stress about where it's going to come from next. She trusted God. I would guarantee you that those other people in the story had way more stress about their giving.

C.S. Lewis said, "I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare." Wow! That's challenging. This is what Jesus is commending about her giving. She could have used that money for herself, but she didn't.

Now, I ask you, have you ever wondered what you would do with the tithes and offerings you give if you stopped giving them to the church? Those of you who are faithful givers, has the

thought ever crossed your mind of what you would do if God just said, all of a sudden, you don't have to give anymore?

It has mine! Obviously, you're not nearly as unspiritual as I am, but I have thought about that often. If God all of a sudden just somehow chose to carry out the work of the gospel, the work of the ministry, without money, what would you do with what you faithfully give? Would it be to pay off a second mortgage, or maybe pay off some debt?

Would you remodel some more? You might even start saving a little bit more for the kids' college education? Right now, some of you are trying to figure out how you can homeschool your college kids. I wish that was a possibility. I would have looked into it! I'm not quite smart enough.

I know what I would do with the money we give. I would buy Tammi that fishing boat. You guys know what I'm talking about. I would buy her the fishing boat I've always wanted her to want me to have. That's sweet of me, right? And all the men who fish said, "Amen." You women are married to good men, right there.

One thing is for sure. For most of us, if that were the case, our minds would turn immediately inward. We would turn to us. We would say, "What can I spend? What can I get? What else can I have? What can I buy?" That alone is evidence of how important this subject is! We learn it at a very young age.

One day, the pastor was picking up his doctor friend to go play a round of golf on a Saturday morning. When he showed up at the doctor's house, the 5-year-old answered the door and said, "Oh, my daddy's not here. He had to go perform an emergency appendectomy." The pastor, stunned that this 5-year-old could even pronounce that word, said, "Uh, sweetie, do you even know what that means?" She said, "Yup! It means \$2,500, and that doesn't even include the anesthesiologist!" At a very young age, we get it!

Today, I don't want to exhort you to give. I'm not here to exhort you to give. The wealthy people in the story did that, and Jesus wasn't blessed by that at all. I want to exhort all of us to be more like the widow: sacrificially generous.

For some people, the stats are true. It's going to mean this is a call to you to start to tithe. God established in the Old Testament that 10 percent was where his children would start their journey of trusting him to take care of them for their whole lives. In the Old Testament, God started with 10 percent. He looked at his people and he said, "You can do more with the 90 percent than you can with the 100 percent. Give me your trust."

For others of you, there are many in here I suppose who've been giving 10 percent faithfully for years. That was established early on in your life, or it has been there for a while. Maybe God would be calling you today to test him more. You obviously can say, "God has been faithful. He has taken care of us all these years we've tithed."

What if God might say to you it's time to trust him a little bit more, whatever that means? I'm not going to tell you what that means, but it may be time for you to say, "Hey, God has been faithful all this time. Maybe we can give a little bit more and he'll still be faithful!"

A lot fewer of you have been giving way more than a tithe for a while now, and I don't know what God might be saying to you. He might be saying, "I want you to do something silly. I want you to just give a freewill offering to, maybe, your favorite missionary, our prison ministry, or our Damascus House ministry. Just write a check or give however you give. Just do something that just doesn't make any sense." The results will be staggering.

We did the math this week and the math is if just everyone did the first one, that we were all faithful in tithing, our offerings here at Canyon Hills would double immediately. Your life would never be the same. The spread of the gospel would explode and our work going on right now in India, Nepal, and Japan would just... Who knows what else we could do? The poor and the needy among us, right around here in our area... The widows, the single moms, and the elderly who are hurting...

Stewardship matters. Giving matters. It matters to Jesus, it matters to each other, and it matters to this world. My challenge today, if we can be super-specific... I'm just going to encourage you over the next two months as you give, starting with however you give next... I don't know when you get paid or how you work it out, but starting next, I want to encourage you to be sacrificially generous and don't think it doesn't matter, because it does.

Charles Spurgeon, the late, great pastor, said, "In all of my years of service to my Lord, I have discovered a truth that has never failed and has never been compromised. That truth is that it is beyond the realm of possibilities that one has the ability to out-give God. Even if I give the whole of my worth to him, he will find a way to give back to me much more than I gave." I think that's what was going on in the heart of the widow, and that's what Jesus was admiring and commending. Let's pray.

O God in heaven, we know you are good. We know it in our heads and we know it in our hearts. I pray, God, that this would be a church filled with people who trust you, who believe you love them. I pray, God, that we would be a church filled with people where our giving, our generosity, doesn't make any sense to a watching world. Yet we believe your math is different than our math, and so, God, we pray you are pleased with our desire to trust.

God, I pray especially for those who just think they can't afford it. In some supernatural way, God, comfort them. Help them to see your blessing. Help them to know they do not have to be wealthy to give. God, we just pray that whatever changes you want to do, you would accomplish for our good and for your glory. In Christ's name, amen.

Now, here's the great possibility. Some of you are sitting here and you've never surrendered your heart to Jesus, so all this stuff about giving for the gospel ministry doesn't even make sense. Jesus would say to you right now, "Hey, first, give your soul to me, and then we'll talk about living a generous life."

First, trust your soul to Jesus. Repent of your sin. Believe his death on the cross is the forgiveness you need. Surrender to him as your Lord and Savior. If you sense that is where you are right now, we want to help you take that step of faith. All you need to do is just walk forward and talk to one of these people. They are excited to talk to you. All you have to do is say, "Hey, I want to believe. I want Jesus to be my Savior." Start there. I hope you will before you go. I'm so looking forward to next Sunday. God bless you. We'll see you then.