



Exodus (Part 28) – Generous Hearts and Hands

Matt Chandler – April 30, 2017

[Video]

From darkness to light, this is the story we all share as the people of God. The story of Israel is the story of us today. We are God's people. He draws us out to draw us in, and, like the Israelites, we still await the Promised Land in the midst of our sin and suffering, yet God is with us.

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Go ahead and grab your Bibles. We're going to be in Exodus, chapter 35. We're going to read a chunk of that, and then we're going to go over and look at a few verses of chapter 36. It's really hard for me to believe that after this weekend we only have three weekends left in the book of Exodus. We started in late August, and other than four weeks in January we've consistently made our way through this book. Part of me is kind of sad that it's almost over. It has been an incredible series. At least I've enjoyed it. Maybe you haven't, but I've enjoyed preaching it.

What I want to do is take a moment up front and pull back a little bit and remind us of where we are in the narrative, where we are in the story. At this point, what we're looking at is that God has saved Israel out of slavery. He has pulled his people out of slavery, and he hasn't just saved them out of slavery for nothing, but he says he's going to make them a distinct people that the nations might know. God is going to not only pull his people out of slavery, oppression, sin, and death, but then he's going to form them in such a way that the nations will look upon them and know that he is God.

What God is up to is shaping, forming, making a people for himself. Really, all spring this is what we've been talking about, that the presence and power of God in our lives marks us distinctly among people who are far from God. I love the way Jesus talks about those who aren't Christians. He uses the word *lost*. That word *lost* is really a beautiful thing. It's like they lost their way, and Christ has come to save them from that lostness.

What God is doing in the household of faith, in a covenant community of faith, kind of like what we are here at The Village Church, is he's distinctively marking a people that reveal to the world his goodness, his grace, his compassion, his mercy, and that's what we've been looking at through the winter into the spring: God doing this among us. We're going to look again at another distinctive mark around what it means to be the people of God in our gathering today.

I'm just going to say it so you can breathe out. Nobody needs to panic. We're going to talk about generosity. I'm not passing a plate, and we don't have any plans or big needs for billions of dollars. The text is dictating that we're talking about generosity, so we're going to talk about generosity the way the Bible talks about generosity. I'll give you my outline before we start to read. I know some of you type A-ers need this. Let me just help you.

We're going to talk about the motive of generosity. That's one of the things that makes us distinct among worldly generosity. It's not just Christians who are generous. You know that. You don't have to be a Christian to be generous. There are some full-on pagan fools who are really generous with their money, with their resources.

What makes us a distinct people is the *motive* of our generosity and then the *metric* of our generosity and then, ultimately, the *method* of our generosity. Do you like that? That's alliteration. That rarely happens around here. That was for you. I love you. Let's look at this. Exodus 35, starting in verse 4.

"Moses said to all the congregation of the people of Israel, 'This is the thing that the LORD has commanded. Take from among you a contribution to the LORD. Whoever is of a generous heart, let him bring the LORD's contribution: gold, silver, and bronze; blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen; goats' hair, tanned rams' skins, and goatskins; acacia wood, oil for the light, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, and onyx stones and stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breastpiece.

Let every skillful craftsman among you come and make all that the LORD has commanded: the tabernacle, its tent and its covering, its hooks and its frames, its bars, its pillars, and its bases; the ark with its poles, the mercy seat, and the veil of the screen; the table with its poles and all its utensils, and the bread of the Presence; the lampstand also for the light, with its utensils and its lamps, and the oil for the light; and the altar of incense, with its poles, and

the anointing oil and the fragrant incense, and the screen for the door, at the door of the tabernacle; the altar of burnt offering, with its grating of bronze, its poles, and all its utensils, the basin and its stand; the hangings of the court, its pillars and its bases, and the screen for the gate of the court; the pegs of the tabernacle and the pegs of the court, and their cords; the finely worked garments for ministering in the Holy Place, the holy garments for Aaron the priest, and the garments of his sons, for their service as priests.'

Then all the congregation of the people of Israel departed from the presence of Moses. And they came, everyone whose heart stirred him, and everyone whose spirit moved him, and brought the LORD's contribution to be used for the tent of meeting, and for all its service, and for the holy garments. So they came, both men and women. All who were of a willing heart brought brooches and earrings and signet rings and armlets, all sorts of gold objects, every man dedicating an offering of gold to the Lord."

We could keep reading. You get this epic giving campaign that just breaks out around the mountain. Here's what I want to point out to you. This is happening at an interesting moment in the narrative. What have we just finished studying? The rebellion of God's people against God and God responding to that with grace, with mercy, with kindness. They have broken their pledge against God.

In the last few weeks, what we pointed out is that God's people's rebellion against him was the equivalent (and in our lives *is* the equivalent) of entering into the marriage vows and then defiling the marriage bed on their honeymoon. It was this blatant disregard for God's holiness, his might, how he had delivered them up. How does God respond to that? He responds to that with grace. He responds with mercy. He moves toward them, not from them.

There's discipline, but there's a lot of kindness, mercy, grace, and forgiveness, and then there's this contribution. "All that we've talked about... It's time to start building. Bring what we need to build." We'll see here they bring it and they bring it and they bring it. Day after day after day, for an extended period of time, they keep bringing it. We begin to see that one of the things that makes the people of God distinct is their generosity.

Let's dive into these three *Ms*. The first is the *motive* of generosity. As we've already established, you don't have to love Jesus, you don't have to be a Christian to be generous. In fact, you can be far from God and be generous. I know people who want nothing to do with Jesus Christ, have no plan to

submit, and, in fact, their lives are marked with outright rebellion against him, who are extremely generous people. In fact, I find them sometimes more generous than some stingy Christians I know.

What, then, makes us distinct as a generous people? Well, the motive of our generosity. The motive of the generosity of the people of God finds its root in the generosity of God toward his people. What motivates us is not a guilty conscience. It's not like we're trying to earn favor. It's not that we're trying to validate ourselves as good people by being generous. Rather we have received generosity in such lavish ways that we become overwhelmed by God's generosity to us, so then it flows out of us.

We talked last week about the fact that God is abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, but the Bible also tells us in Romans 5:20... I love, love, love this verse. If you've been here for any amount of time, I come back to this verse often. Here's what Romans 5:20 says. **"Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more..."**

If you've been here, you've heard me say this. You can't out-sin the cross of Christ. Do you know where I get that? Exodus and Romans 5. You have never in your life committed the type of sin that the people of Israel have just committed against God Almighty, and God's response is grace. "Where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more." You'll never out-sin the grace of God.

If you're not a Christian and you're nervous coming in here, thinking maybe the Lord might light you up if he were to wake up and look, like, "What's this dude doing here?" Nuh-uh. If you came in with that kind of trepidation, let me try to help you. God's love, his mercy, his grace abounds. If you're like, "Well, I'm a really big sinner," okay, did you read what I read? We read it together. God's grace then abounds all the more.

His volume of grace exceeds your volume of sinfulness. That's great news, and that motivates us as the people of God, that God just continues to lavish upon us grace. Here's a thought. Lauren and I talk about this often. When you get a snippet of the brokenness of this world, when you get a front-row seat to something awful...maybe a lot of drama, maybe a marriage that's disintegrated, maybe a sick child, maybe just someone who's really like a wolf...

You just know this little bitty space in which you inhabit. The God of the Bible sees it all, everywhere, all the time. He is aware of every act of brutality, every bit of despicable, shady, dehumanizing activity on the face of the earth. I oftentimes think, "How does he not kill everyone?"

I become most aware of the fact that I am unfit to be God around this idea, because I would run out of patience and would not be abounding in steadfast love. I would be abounding in whipping some tail. But this isn't the God of the Bible. This motivates us. He's so generous to us.

That's not the only motive. The other motive of our generosity is the Christian who knows the Bible understands not only are we recipients of the generosity of God but, on top of that, everything we own is his already. We're simply stewards of what God has entrusted to us. I love this in the book of Exodus. They've come out of slavery. Where did they get all this stuff? God delivered it over to them.

Nobody is like, "I worked really hard." No, no, no. You plundered Egypt because of the power of God. "I got my master's." No, you didn't. You were a slave, and God just lavished upon you wealth as he conquered your enemies. What happens is we read Exodus like, "Well, that's not really *my* story. If you had any idea how hard I work at work..." Listen. I don't need to know how hard you work at work. I hope you *would* work hard at work. That's why it's work. For the glory of God you should work hard at work.

Here's what I will tell you. I know plenty of people who work just as hard who don't make what you make. That is the grace of God on you. You own nothing. You earned nothing that was not entrusted to you by God. It's all his stuff. Everything you own is his. Everything I have is his already. I'm not saying *mine*; I'm saying *ours*. "Man in the cloth. Of course." No, no, no. *All* of us. Everything we have is his. This motivates.

We understand it, so we don't hoard it, because we understand that he has given it to us to steward it. To what end? Well, we've already read in Exodus: that we will be for him a kingdom of priests, distinct among the nations, revealing that we don't worship false gods. The motive behind our generosity is not that we feel bad that we make money. It's not that we want to prove to others and to ourselves that we're good people. That's not what motivates us. It shouldn't be.

If that's what's motivating you to be generous, you should repent. That's not what makes us distinct. The world is motivated by those things. Do you know what *we're* motivated by? God's generosity toward us and the reality that God trusts us with all this stuff. The first time I felt this in a profound way wasn't around money; it was around children. The first time I held Audrey, I was like, "Oh my gosh. He's going to trust me with this? I have a long track record of stumbling and failing, and he's going to put a little soul in my house to nurture and care for?"

He abundantly is gracious to us, and then he entrusts us with his stuff. You're not taking anything with you. There's that old idea. "I'm going to leave a legacy for my children." The book of Ecclesiastes says one of your children's children's children is going to be a moron and is going to blow all you worked hard for. Congrats.

If you're like, "I don't want to study that book," we already did it. You're safe. If you want to go back and listen to it, you can, but we won't go through Ecclesiastes again. (Maybe we will.) This is the motive of generosity: I am a recipient of God's generosity, and all that I have is God's, and I want to steward it well because it's not mine, and I will be held accountable for how I steward God's resources. That's what's motivating me. That's what's motivating my generosity.

Now let's talk about the *metrics* of generosity. If you're church folk, you'll appreciate this. If you're a guest with us and don't have a background in church, you might be like, "Okay, what?" The conversation that starts happening around generosity is, "Now, Pastor, are you talking about the tithe or are you talking about the offering? Are you talking about 10 percent? And is that 10 percent gross? Is that before tax or is that after tax?"

You start playing these games. "Are you saying that I have to give 10 percent to the church and then anything else is an offering above that?" We start to muddy up the waters, but that is not God's metric. That is not how God measures generosity in his people. In fact, here's how God measures it. I'll read the verse that's on our Joy Boxes on the walls. That's what we call them. Here's the verse that's on that, and here's how God measures generosity.

Second Corinthians 9:7: "**Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.**" If you have a little app or something that plays with the Greek, that word *cheerful* in the Greek is the root that we get the word *hilarious* from. God loves a hilarious giver.

So do you want to know God's metric on generosity? If you want to dive in and study the difference between tithes and offerings, and whether the Old Testament tithe holds over into the New Testament, that's a worthwhile study. Dig in. But I'm telling you what God looks at around the metrics of generosity is your heart. That's what he's after. Over and over again, what God is after is your heart.

Oftentimes, people who aren't really church people say, "All the church wants is my money." No, no. The church wants so much more than your money. They want your life, your vision, your future, your gifts, your talents, and your cash. God wants it all, because he wants your heart. All of that has a way of distorting and disfiguring you if he doesn't have your heart. Don't give reluctantly.

You don't want to give? God doesn't *want* you to give. Don't give under compulsion. You should never give because somebody did a drive-by guilt on you. You should never give under compulsion. How should you give? hilariously, cheerfully. Where are we finding that cheer? In the generosity of God toward us, in the reality that we've been given much to steward, that God has entrusted to us these things.

I keep thinking this is like if you back out and go, "This is the plan of God? To trust us?" How many of you are confident in this plan? If it weren't for the Holy Spirit of God, this is the dumbest plan ever. "Let me take really selfish, self-absorbed people and entrust my message, entrust my branding, entrust my resources to rescue the world from sin and death." I know us. That's a bad plan...unless the Spirit of God. Praise his name. We have the Spirit of God.

Now this reluctantly and under compulsion... Here's something that's interesting to know. Again, we're not taking an offering. Nobody panic. Jesus teaches on money more than he teaches on almost anything else...more than he teaches on heaven, more than he teaches on hell. You get a hint of why he's doing this. Here's what he says in Matthew 6: "Where your treasure is your heart is also."

If sometimes you're like, "Man, I just don't quite know where I'm landing. Does my heart really fully belong to the Lord?" Do you know where the Bible tells you to check on that? Not a spiritual gifts test. It's your checking account. "Does my heart really belong to the Lord? Let me take this test up at the church to see what my gifts are." No, no. Look at where your heart is. Look at where you're spending all your money. Look at where you fantasize.

Where your treasure is your heart will be also, and God, who wants to move toward you in compassion and mercy, is saying, "Be marked by generosity. Understand I have given you much. Understand that I have lavished upon you grace upon grace, and every time you stumble I've been there to meet you with more grace. Every time you've blown it, I've extended out of my riches, out of my kindness, mercy to you. Be like me."

This is the metric of generosity. Not, "Well, I give 5 percent" or "I give 8 percent" or "I give 12 percent." I think giving can be strategic, but what God is after is your heart. Do you have a generous heart? Are you a cheerful, a hilarious giver?

Lastly, I want to talk about the *methods* of generosity. I have four categories here. They're not categories I came up with. They're categories that a pastor I know in New York named Jon Tyson came up with, so I'm going to steal from him. Thank you, Jon, if you're listening, for doing work for me.

Here would be the first method. How are we to be generous? In Galatians 6:10, the apostle Paul writes this to the churches in Galatia: "**So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.**" In one sense, one of the buckets... We're going to talk about the method of generosity, *where* we're to be generous. We have a clear mark in the Scriptures that one of the places we're to be generous is to the church we worship in.

Now here's what I love. I want to affirm you. You might be the most generous group of people I have ever been around. This is not a, "Ooh, we're low on cash. I'd better preach." That's not this sermon. In fact, I don't think you should ever preach those. God should never beg for what's already his. That's not this kind of sermon. That's not what it is. We give to the church that disciples us, that visits us in the hospital, that cares for us, that edifies us in the Lord when we gather, that works for our good. We want to be generous on this front.

For the last five years, you guys have given so beyond what we've budgeted and we've spent so below what we've budgeted that we've been able to launch campuses and support gospel works all over the world. Your dollars have gone to the ends of the earth, supporting missionaries, planting churches in hard places, in places that I can't even talk to you about unless we're on a closed mic, not broadcasting this, because people's lives would be at stake. You have done this. Your generosity has done this.

I'm not saying that so you can back off that generosity but so that you might all the more give to the purposes of God in this place. We're not hoarding money here. Nobody is getting rich here. We're modeling this to you as a congregation. So we give to the local context. I know that's not always sexy. You're like, "Oh man, you're paying for lights and..." Yeah, because you're grown-ups. That's what grown-ups get to do: pay those kinds of bills.

So this is one of those categories. Let me give you another one. I love this one. I have a couple of stories from our congregation that I just love. Acts 4:34-35. This is called *spontaneous giving*.

"There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need."

I love this idea that you have some wealthy landowners, and they just hear of a need, and they're like, "Oh gosh, sell it. Here, make sure nobody has a need." That's spontaneous. Before I became the pastor at The Village, I worked at a church in Abilene and did itinerate ministry. We moved to Dallas, started a nonprofit, and I was just traveling all over preaching. I drove a 1989 Chevy Corsica. The driver's side door wouldn't open, and I don't mean like it would open from the inside. I mean it wouldn't open.

So six-foot-five (I was a little lighter back then), 136-pound me had to get in the passenger side to start the car, and then the air and heat didn't work, so if there was ever frost I had to roll down and Ace Ventura the ride home. (Some of you are with me, some of you aren't. It's fine.) I think there were over 200,000 miles on that car. It was awful.

A very kind woman, a member of this church, contacted my wife and me before I was here and said, "I would love to get you a car that would safely get you to the places you're going." She bought us a 3-series BMW and just gave it to us. That's spontaneous generosity. I'm going to be straight. I couldn't keep it, so I had to call her a couple of months later and be like, "Hey, gosh, that was so incredible. Do you mind if I sell this and get something else?"

Keep in mind I'm 24, driving up to preach in places in a 3-series BMW, getting out like, "Where am I preaching?" You can't do that. Okay, *I* can't. I am not free enough in the Lord to do that. I am not free enough in Christ to drive a BMW to a speaking engagement when I'm 24. I don't even know that I'm free enough now. But if you have one, that's a sweet ride. I'm jealous of your freedom. Enjoy that for me. I'm getting something cool in glory.

I also want to use *this* as an example. What I don't want to happen here is for you to begin to hear that generosity is for those who have an abundance. We'll get to that more in a moment. There's a family here at the church (I'm so tempted to name them, but I won't, because I don't want to take from them what's waiting for them in glory) who are just head on a swivel. They're not wealthy. In

fact, to my knowledge, they maybe have taken one or two vacations in the last five or six years, and they are constantly extending generosity wherever they see it.

There was a member of our church whose car broke down. It just died. It, like, went home to be with the Lord. They work hard, long, six-day-a-week kind of jobs, and they scraped up money and helped that family out. Another family... In the heat of last summer, the air conditioner went out in their vehicle. They have a bunch of small kids. Once again, here they are scraping up some money to fix that air conditioner.

There was a young family in a car... They saw that the tires looked like an Indy 500 car, you know, bald, and they replaced the tires. On and on I could go. This is spontaneous generosity. This is seeing a need and meeting it. In the first case, a woman with a lot of means. In the second case, not a family with a lot of means. Just a family who's serious about being generous out of an overflow of the generosity *they* have received from the Lord.

Then there's *secret generosity*. This is my favorite. Matthew 6:3-4: "**But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.**" I love this, because here's what happens. When you give in secret, the only one who's getting praise is God.

I don't know if this has ever happened to you, where you get an anonymous gift. You're kind of jammed up, and you're like, "Okay, Lord, I'm going to do whatever I can do. I don't know what we're going to do here." Then something just shows up. Someone blesses you, and you have no idea who it is. What are you forced to do? You're like, "Thank you, God." You have to thank something, but there's no one to thank but the Lord who provided for you through secret generosity. It's my favorite kind.

Then I want to talk a little bit about this. The fourth category if we're talking about the methods of generosity is *sacrificial generosity*. Second Corinthians 8:1-7 says, "**We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.**"

Most of us don't even have categories for what we just read. In a time of extreme poverty, they were overwhelmed with joy. Remember last week when we were talking about God is glorious and better

than? Exhibit Z squared. Severe poverty, filled with joy. Brothers and sisters, this is the reason I want to constantly encourage you to get on a short-term trip. Go somewhere where they don't have any of the things we're pursuing, and check out their joy and grow in an understanding that he is not just enough but he is abundant. Let me keep reading, because it gets more beautiful, if that was possible.

"For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints..." I have never met a pastor who told me, "My people are begging to give more to the church. What do you do?" But that's what's happening. They're begging to be a part of what God... "How can we give? What can we do? I know we have next to nothing, but what can we do to be a part of what God is up to in our day?" This is sacrificial giving.

"...and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace." Listen to this in verse 7. "But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also."

What's the act of grace? Sacrificial giving. You excel in everything. Let's not ever be satisfied as a community of faith to read about our church and go, "We excel in everything. We excel in faith, we excel in speech, we excel in knowledge, and we excel in earnestness and love," and not have that rounded out with sacrificial generosity. Excel in this also: sacrificial generosity.

Now I do want to stop and just say this before I start to close us out. I know that some of you are not hearing this as exciting news but as very crushing news. There have been some decisions made, some things leveraged, and you are drowning right now in debt, and it feels as though there would be no possibility for generosity in your life at all.

I don't want to ever in any way lay burdens on you that the Lord has not laid on you. What I want you to be aware of is that we're here to try to serve you and help you. So if you're drowning in debt and your pride has you stuck, unwilling to admit that and confess that, why don't you let us help you? We have trained people here. What they do is help you in these areas.

I know the world in which we live. Most of us didn't have parents who taught us budgeting, who taught us how to handle money. Most of us figured it out as we moved forward. Some of us, God help us, *didn't* figure it out. If you're my age... I remember every football game you went to in college, there were credit card people out there giving you a free tee shirt if you would just sign up for their card.

So you have a ton of student loan debt. You have 40 grand in student loans is my story, and every time you go to a football game they're like, "Hey, you want a free Aggie tee shirt? Fill out this credit card." Anytime you go, they're like, "Fill this out. Get a credit card." You don't know any better, so maybe you're leveraged up to your eyeball and you just feel paralyzed.

We want to serve you and help you. It's not so that you can give to the church but so you can be freed up to walk in the joy of generosity. It is better to give than to receive. It just is. You know this at Christmas. You love how it feels when someone is opening up the gift you gave them. "Are they going to be excited?" There's something there.

So don't let these categories make you feel paralyzed. Please don't downshift into shame. We've already covered earlier in the sermon that there's no sin with more power than the cross of Jesus Christ, no mistake you've made that disqualifies you or discounts you for gospel ministry. Let us come alongside of you. Let us help you.

Remember what God is doing here. God is making us distinct. I want to start to put this on the ground. I don't want it to be ethereal. I want to talk about generosity unleashed from a community of faith. What if you walked in this type of generosity in your neighborhood, in your workplace, at the restaurants you visit, to the baristas you interact with, to that crew at Whole Foods that's making you that Green Goddess seven times a week? What would happen if we were just marked by generosity like this?

Evangelism and generosity are so tightly interwoven. Maybe you're like, "I don't know what to do." Just be generous. How do you be generous? You're paying attention to the souls around you. You've been at work and seen that someone is struggling. You've been at work and seen that someone has hit a rough spot. Generous people start to engage. "Are you okay? Is everything all right? I'm not trying to be nosy. Why don't we go grab a cup of coffee? Let me buy you lunch. Let's go sit down and have lunch. How can I pray for you? Is there any way I can serve you?"

This makes us distinct. We genuinely care, not to get scalps but because we've received such grace. It is the Spirit of God that came to us. "Are you all right? I know you're not all right. Let me help you." So we extend that. What would it be like in all of our Home Groups if this was our reality, that we were generous people? "Oh man. Let's meet this need. Guys, how can we meet this need?" What if there were no needs? I told you we were going to read a little bit of chapter 36. Look over at chapter 36, picking up in verse 3.

"And they received from Moses all the contribution that the people of Israel had brought for doing the work on the sanctuary. They still kept bringing him freewill offerings every morning, so that all the craftsmen who were doing every sort of task on the sanctuary came, each from the task that he was doing, and said to Moses, 'The people bring much more than enough for doing the work that the LORD has commanded us to do.'

So Moses gave command, and word was proclaimed throughout the camp, 'Let no man or woman do anything more for the contribution for the sanctuary.' So the people were restrained from bringing, for the material they had was sufficient to do all the work, and more."

Remember that list where they were like, "Okay, we need to build the tabernacle. We have the screen. We have to have the base. We have the bronze work. We have the rings. We need the linens." All of the workers came and were like, "Man, too much. Tell them to stop." Oh, I dream as a pastor to just go, "Look, stop for a bit. We don't know what to do. The whole world is almost saved. We've almost eradicated poverty. Quit it!" This is incredible.

I know we're like, "Oh man." We talk a lot about disenchantment. We talk a lot about doubt and how even a sermon like this could have us go, "Oh man, really? You're saying that one of the big keys that makes us distinct as a people is generosity?" I don't want you to be disenchanted. I want you to be enchanted. I want you to believe in magic. You maybe have an Independent Baptist background. I'm not talking about *that* kind of magic. I want to tell you a story and read you a quote.

Caesar Hadrian became Caesar of Rome in around 117, and he was a religious man. Not a Christian, a religious man. In fact, he built the temple of Venus. So here a religious man, and he was so weirded out by this small but very rapidly growing cult called *the Way* (we call it *Christianity*) that he sent a man to get to the bottom of what made us, as the people of God, distinct. So you have a caesar of

Rome who built a temple to Venus, who starts to get anxious about Christianity's growing global influence, so he sends a spy in to check us out. His name was Aristides.

In a letter back to Caesar, here's basically what he wrote: "They love one another, and he who has gives to him who has not without boasting. And when they see a stranger, they take him into their homes and rejoice over him as a very brother. And if there is among them any that are poor and needy, and if they have no spare food, they fast two or three days in order to supply to the needy their lack of food. Such, O king, is their manner of life, and, verily, this is a new people, and there is something divine in the midst of them."

That isn't a fairy tale. That happened. The people of God, marked by generosity, motivated by the grace and mercy of God, with the metric being a heart that is cheerful in the Lord, with the method of empowering churches to do the work of raising up individuals for ministry while sacrificially giving, secretly giving, all the while with a cheerful disposition, rejoicing in the moving of the gospel to the ends of the earth.

I'll just end with this. How far have we fallen? Does American evangelicalism look anything like that? More than I am bagging on the current state of the church, I am laying before you a hope I have for us. What might happen all over Flower Mound, Highland Village, Lewisville, if we lived generous lives like this? Every need we saw we stepped into. In the church there were no needs, because if we were aware of the need we would be happy to meet it.

What if you felt comfortable letting your needs be known because you had experienced the grace of God in your life and knew that there are no perfect people? Sometimes generosity is stifled by the pride of the needy. "I can't let anybody know we're struggling here. I can't let anybody know this is a legitimate need." No, you can and you should. The generosity of God's people toward you is a tangible expression of God's kindness to you. My dream isn't American evangelicalism. My dream is our community of faith to the ends of the world. Why can't it happen again? It just takes the Spirit of God to reorient our hearts. Let's pray.

Father, thank you for your generosity to us. We just praise you for that generosity, your kindness, that you would entrust to us all that you have. When I think about the dollars in my account, when I think about my home, when I think about the places in which you've placed my life, you have been stunningly generous. Forgive me where I have at times hoarded or thought something other than "That's your stuff."

I praise you for how well this church models this, but I ask all the more that you would stir up in our hearts a supernatural, divine generosity, that our kindness not just to the household of faith here at The Village but our kindness all over this town, to every barista, to every waiter or waitress, to every person we come across, might make us so distinct that those we work with, those our kids play sports with, those whose houses are next to ours would be so confused by our generosity and kindness as to be drawn up into the story of your great redemption, and as this man wrote to Caesar, "Surely there is something of the divine among them."

Help us. Some of us are drowning in debt, so help us. We want to repent of that where it has been foolish. Would you put us back on solid ground? For others, Father, who have just a vision of life that's this world, forgive us. Expose to us; help us see where our hearts are and where our real treasure lies. I thank you that we have greater hope for just life on this planet. We praise you that you are the greater treasure. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.