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## **Glad and Sincere Hearts**

### **Part 3 – The Generosity of Our church**

Pastor Ted Cunningham

We started a series a couple of weeks ago called *Glad and Sincere Hearts*. That we would be known as a church full of believers with glad and sincere hearts. Today we are in part three. We've looked at the purposes, the ordinances, and today we are talking about the generosity of our church. A few years ago, I had the opportunity to buy an Orvis Helios 2 fly rod. Retail value on this thing is \$1,000.00 which I think is ridiculous for a fly rod. I had an opportunity to buy a brand new one for \$200.00. So, here's what I told Amy. I said, "It's not that I spent \$200.00. I saved us \$800.00." So, I love this fly rod. I used it once, but one of the things I love to do in Branson is when pastor friends visit here from around the country, I obviously love to take them to enjoy a sport that I love very much, fly fishing. And for many, I'm teaching them for the very first time how to take care of mending and all that.

I have a buddy who had recently moved to Colorado. He showed up and we went fishing. And I used another rod. I let him use the Orvis Helios 2 fly rod. He loved it and we were packing up the vehicle at the end of the day and he said, "Ted, 'I'm so into this. I live in Colorado. I'm going to get into fly fishing. What rod do you think I should get?" I knew the Lord was saying, "Give him this rod and I was like, "Lord, we can talk about this later? I've only used it once. And he's not even that good. He didn't even treat it all that well." Have you ever had those conversations with the Lord? And I don't know what my face looked like, but I remember... They are up to the Orvis Helios 3 now but the 2 is still my favorite. The rod was beautiful. The thing was so awesome. I closed it all up and I hope my face didn't do what my inside was doing. I was like, "Here. You can have it."

Let me ask you. Have you ever had a hard time getting rid of something? Knowing clearly I don't ever have a problem with what many of my friends in this church have. I see it all the time. I have people in here I know I can't compliment their driver on the golf course, or you don't compliment something they are wearing. You don't even compliment their car because they are the type of person that will give it to you. That's extreme generosity.

And when I think about another show that I love, American Pickers with Mike and Frank. When they show up at a farm and this old guy walks out and he's got barns overflowing with stuff he's collected for 60 years... He's got sheds and tractor trailers just full of stuff. Mike and Frank will open up a shed that hasn't been opened in 30 years, and they'll crawl through there. They'll pull out a sign to this guy and he's like, "Oh, I haven't seen that thing in probably 40 years." And Mike goes, "I'll give you \$500.00 for it. What does the guy say a lot of the time? He says, "I think I'll hold onto that for a little while longer."

Now I don't want to state the obvious, but I want to be like "Bro, you're 94 years old. You ain't got much time left on this earth. You haven't enjoyed that thing for the last 40 years and you're going to keep it?"

So, there's that guy, but I love it when they go to an 89 year old guy and they find this old vehicle that hasn't run for 40 years and they make him an offer on it. I love when they say something like this: "It's time for someone else to enjoy it." I always love that because that is a reminder to each and every one of us, as followers of Jesus. Do you realize everything you own is God's? You are just a steward, you are just a manager of what he's given you. And when we give, it's not like we're giving God his part back. No, it's all his. And when we give and when we are generous and when we let go of something that we love and hold onto dearly... I prefer the Orvis Helios 3 to be honest with you, but now I've found Orvis will inscribe your name on the fly rod. The lord can't have me give away a rod with my name on it. And why would you want a rod with my name on it anyway? So, you're free to use it for the afternoon.

But it's all His. Look at what it says in Proverbs 11; 24-25. ***One person gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. 25 A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.*** And what we want for you... Again, remember we said it in week one. The purposes of the church are also the purposes for you life. The generosity of this church should also be modeled in each one of us individually to be generous, giving well. And our desire for you, for each one of you who claim the name of Jesus across this campus and watching online, is that you would be one who is known at refreshing others. They are refreshed by you in your acts. I said this at 8:15. You know we have a lot of seniors at 8:15 and a lot of senior adults in here. You're thinking about your estate planning and what you're going to do with your resources and everything when you die. Let me encourage you. Don't wait until you're dead to start giving.

I love this quote. I've shared it with you before. It's by John Maxwell. He says, "*Giving while you're living so you're knowing where it's going.*"

If you're like, "I'll be generous later," the encouragement today for you is to be generous now.

One of the core values of our church... We learned this from a pastor years ago, but it became a core value pretty quickly. We just taught it once as part of a message years ago and it just caught on with the teaching team and ministry leaders and volunteers, with many of you. As you look around at all the needs in our community and all the needs in our church, it can keep us from giving sometimes. "It's just too great and my part won't matter." But here's what we say when it comes to our giving individually and as a church. *We do for one what we can't do for all.* We can't support all the missionaries in the world, but we can support some. We can't support every ministry in Branson or in Southwest Missouri or Northwest Arkansas, but we can support some. And we can do for one what we can't do for all.

Today what we want to do is look at four ways we practice generosity as a church, and we want you to participate. We want you to be a part of it.

If you have your Bible, turn to 1 Corinthians 16. That's where we are going to start. We're going to make some observations in this text as we look at the very first way that we are generous as a church.

1. **We give collectively.** You and I gather each week, followers of Jesus, as we take an offering every week. And we give collectively. There are five observations that we need to make in 1Corinthians 16: 1-3 as the apostle Paul is encouraging the Corinthian church with the collection for the Lord's people. That's an offering. This offering is going to impoverished believers in Jerusalem. **Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. 2 On the first day of every week...** So, the very first thing we see about an offering is it's systematic, it's regular, it's something that should be a regular part of our lives.

For Amy and I, we give on the first day of every month. We do it through the Church Center App. We give our tithes and offering on the first day of the month. But it's a regular thing we do. There are still some in our church that you're paid once a month or your annuity check comes in once a month, but you still like to give each week. The bottom line is when we give collectively, we're giving on a regular basis. The key here and the second observation... **...each one of you should...** Your income determines how much you give, it does not determine whether or not you give. What we are talking about today is for every believer, no matter what your income level. **...set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income...** Meaning there are some of you in here who give a lot more because you make a lot more.

He doesn't give a percentage here because we are going to see in 2 Corinthians as well, he says you need to determine in your heart what you should give. We know that Jesus practiced the tithe. In the New Testament, we read that Paul is always encouraging the church to give liberally, to give generously. So, whatever your income level is, that's where you need to start and think about, with your budget, what you're giving. I had a seminary professor in Dallas. His name was Ramesh Richard. I had to look up this week what class he taught. I couldn't even remember the class, but this part I remembered. I took it from the class and took it home to Amy. We were married just a year or two and probably 23, 24 years old. He said, "My wife and I make the decision early on in our marriage that we wanted the number one line-item in our budget to be our gift to the church. We always wanted it to be more than our mortgage or any car payments, but we just made that decision." On that day, it was clear to me that if I want to be generous in my giving, I was going to do the same thing.

I went home and Amy and I talked about it. I said, "Can we make this our goal as a couple that we give more than anything else. That our check is more than our rent at the time or a future mortgage payment. You see what that means for some that as you think about giving, it's in your budget. For those of you who give generously, you know it changes the way you think about cars, changes the way you think about vacations, changes the way you think about homes. You've given plenty over the years, but now we're talking generous, sacrificial giving. He says so do think about it with your income. **...saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.** What Paul is saying is, "I don't want to have to get there and pressure people to give. Have this taken care of before I get there. I don't want to have to make emotional appeals or to use guilt. We are not going to do any of that. Just take a collection." That's what I've loved about 22 years of ministry at Woodland Hills. We take an offering every week. That's just how it works, and we keep it that way.

He gets into Verse 3 and how it should be handled. So much practical in these three verses. **3 Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem.**

Do you know what he's saying here? I don't want to handle the offering. Someone else will handle it. Trust worthy men. Find them and put them in that position.

I need to say thank you Woodland Hills. We started the church almost 22 years ago and in 22 years, I've never counted an offering. I've never made a deposit. I've never signed a check. We set that up early on. Some of you are like, "Good!" I'm with you. Because you know pastors get in trouble... Anybody ever hear of a pastor getting in trouble with money? It happens all the time. So, if you're ever like, "Hey, a deposit went missing, let's check Ted's account," you're free to check my account because it ain't in there. I don't have the ability. I wouldn't even know how to. Someone stopped by the church this week and they needed help turning a light on. I didn't know where the light switch was in that room. That is so freeing to me. The point of this... Paul is saying I not only want to be above reproach in how it should be taken, I want to be above reproach in how it's handled. So, this is very important for you to understand if you are new to our church. This has been true for 22 years. We do not do fund raisers. We don't do pancake breakfasts, we don't do spaghetti dinners, we don't do car washes. We take offerings.

Now, some of you are part of a ministry in town that does fund raisers on a regular basis, and that's fine because that ministry is not a local church. So, we understand that. We don't do the fund raisers here. It's frustrated some of you that did a GoFundMe page and you wanted me to share it on my Facebook. With the amount of scamming out there, you need to understand that if you go to your messenger and see a message from me, asking you to help with funds for the church, it ain't me.

We just don't do any of that online because we don't want any of you to have the feeling like you had last Saturday night when you had to get a Peacock subscription. Oh, I was hot. I was so mad. I was in Minneapolis, and I got a pizza and Dr. Pepper zero. I got into the room, and I opened it up and I'm like, "Well, you ain't watching it tonight, you have to have a Peacock subscription. I was sure we had one. We have 42 subscriptions to watch TV in our house. I call Amy. "Amy, do we have a peacock subscription?" We do not have a peacock subscription. My immediate emotion was anger. So, today is your reminder. You have a little less than three weeks to cancel that bad boy and I say we go right up until the last day and collectively, we shut it down. Oh, I was mad.

Some of you are like, "It's six dollars. Settle down."

We never want you coming into church and be like, "Well, they're asking for this over here and this over there... and there's even a bucket when you leave to put your small change for the college kids that are going. We don't do that. We don't do fund raisers. We take offerings.

Oh, and by the way, I just found out this morning that we can't watch the Chiefs game on anything we have tonight either. It's on CBS and I get Direct TV. CBS is in a lawsuit with Direct TV, so they are not on there anymore. I'm like, "Where am I watching it tonight?" Amy says, "Paramount Plus." Subscription number 44 in the Cunningham house. We've wasted too much time on TV subscriptions. We have three more points. We're not even done with this point.

In 2 Corinthians 9: 7 Paul is saying each one should give what you have decided in your heart to give. So, this is a decision each one... He just said in Chapter 16 of 1 Corinthians each one of us. So, all of us have

to make the decision on giving. Every believer has to make this decision. ***Not reluctantly or under compulsion... There it is again. For God loves a cheerful giver.*** if you are new to our church... You'll see sometimes when I say, "Hey, as part of our worship at Woodland Hills, we take an offering," and many people cheer. Many of you do not because you don't know that years ago, we decided that as part of our worship, we are called to be cheerful givers. Let's let the Lord know that we are grateful to be in the position that we are in, to live where we live, to have the resources that we have, and we get to recognize that by giving back to the Lord and so that's why people cheer.

**2. We meet the needs of others.** We looked at Acts 2: 42-47 a couple of weeks ago, but I want to take you two chapters deeper. This is the first church, the first century church. How they handled giving. We read in Acts 4: 32-35, ***32 All the believers were one in heart and mind... They had great unity. They were together and it was evident in their generosity. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. 33 With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus...***

Isn't it something? Generosity is tied to proclaiming the message. That when needs are met and people's hearts are open because you took care of a physical need, a relational need, an emotional need, now they are open to the good news. ***And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all 34 that there were no needy persons among them.***

We have benevolence here at our church and many of you are going to need that benevolence in January and February because of these cold snaps that we've had. Some of you have adjusted your heat to try to figure out how you're going to get that bill paid at the end of the month or probably February. This is why we have benevolence. We meet the needs of people. And here's what we know, we are to carry one another's burdens to fulfill the law of Christ. So, we will come alongside you and help you through this time. But at the same time, you need to understand you are responsible to carry your load. We carry each other's burdens, you must carry your load. That's why we ask questions when we do benevolence. "Tell me about your job." "Tell me about your second job." I know we are in January and February in Branson when incomes can dip for many. We gather as a church, and we help one another meet the physical needs in this church and in this community. ***For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales 35 and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.***

And we do that with benevolence. Here's why that's important. At this church, we meet physical needs, relational and emotional needs, but we don't stop there. We want people to understand that their greatest need is Jesus. So, physical needs... I always think about Care for Kids and all the great work our schools do in Southwest Missouri and Northwest Arkansas. You can ask the teachers and counselors in here. A hungry student isn't a great student. They are not paying that much attention. So, that's why the backpack program was created. These kids would go home at night to parents who are struggling with addiction or just impoverished and so the kids weren't fed. So food was placed in the backpacks of the children on the way home on the weekend. And then, coming to school in the morning, some of them didn't eat dinner that night and they didn't have breakfast, so the schools found that if they feed the kids in the morning, this is going to meet that need of hunger and they are going to pay more attention.

It's the same thing with relational needs. People show up at Woodland Hills to Marriage 911. They think their greatest need is their marriage and they are crying out to have this crisis that they're in... "Someone to just walk alongside us and help us through it." That's why so many people that come to the Marriage 911 end up following Jesus. It's because they realize in that relational need, their marriage, their greatest need is Jesus.

Emotionally, some of you are here today feeling lonely or isolated and you're looking for community. And you found that relational need met which led to an emotional need met, but you understand the greatest need is Jesus. The word picture I love to use for his is just helping someone up. That's what we do as a church.

When I was getting ready to board a plane on Sunday in Minneapolis, the plane was deplaning. All these people were getting off, and a man about 75 years old I'm guessing, with a little satchel and a roll on suitcase, came flying off there. I know he probably had to catch a flight or something. He didn't pay attention to the ribbon between the two stations there that they use to keep groups 1-4 separate from groups 5-9. Like crossing the finish line of a marathon, he goes running through that thing and the thing wrapped around him and his bag went flying one way and his roller when flying the other way. He face-planted. Now, if it's a guy my age, you're like, whatever... But when it's somebody in their 70's... 12 people ran to his rescue.

They were helping him up. Do you know what I didn't see? I didn't see one person over there going, "You need to slow down. Did you not see the signs over there?" May we never be that church that when people show up here with needs. May we never be the church that would be like, "I've never seen anybody that acted like you, that was crazy. If you would have slowed down, this never would have happened." "At this point, could you just help me up?" That's what it means to meet physical, relational and emotional needs. People are falling down when they step into this place. We pick them up, we care for them, and on that journey, and in that process, we let them know their greatest need is a relationship with Jesus.

**3. We support ministries and missionaries preaching the good news of Jesus.** We want to make sure that those we support – the end game is not just social justice, the end game is here's the good news of Jesus. We read in Philippians 4: 14-18. Scholars that you read around this text would say, this right here is the soul purpose of the Book of Philippians. It's a letter to thank them for their care for him. Yes, find joy in your relationship with the Lord, but you'll read it here. **14 Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles...** You came along and you met my needs. This is right after he said, "I've learned to be content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, I've learned the secret of being content.

**15 Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel...** Meaning from the very beginning when you realized what Jesus did for you, you understood that your life was about doing for others and caring for others. **...when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; 16 for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need...** You knew what I was doing, you knew the ministry, you knew the missions that were taking place, and you wanted to be a part of that. **17 Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. 18 I have**

***received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.***

This ties back to number one, why we give collectively. Because when we gather each week and some of you give monthly, some of you give weekly, but it's a systematic, regular gift going to the ongoing support of missionaries in Haiti, in Indonesia, in Tanzania, in Kenya, all over the world, as we support our missionaries. They can count on this church to send the gifts they need to meet their physical needs, to meet relational needs, as the gospel goes forth. This is how we practice generosity, and we are grateful for it.

Last year, you gave a gift of 25 thousand dollars locally to the fellowship of Christian Athletes. The reason I thought about that this week is because I got an email and I know many of you were involved in it at the local level here and regionally we support them, but across all Fellowship of Christian Athletes, last year, 51,730 decisions for Christ. That's a big deal. That's something I don't participate in but the work that they are doing, we collectively... Individually we give, collectively we give, and we are grateful for what God is doing.

And then here is the final way we practice it. **4. In all of this, we give secretly.** We give secretly. I don't ever show up to a ministry we gift to in this town with a big poster check. I know people do that for recognition and understanding, but we don't announce our gifts in a big way. And sometimes, the church leaders have been invited to dinners. It just gets awkward because we want to give, but we want to do it in a way that honors the Lord. And that is why we aren't doing this for the praise of men, we are doing this to honor our Father.

This is what Jesus says about giving secretly. ***Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.*** He's pretty clear on why. ***When you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets. To be honored by others.*** That's the key. If you are announcing what you're giving to an organization or to another individual. This means when you give, do less of it on Facebook. You can give to a GoFundMe on Facebook, but you don't need to let the world know. If you're looking for the praise of men, Jesus says, you got what you were looking for and there will be no further reward. But if you do it, to honor what Jesus is teaching, and to honor your heavenly father, this is what it says, ***Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward in full. 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. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret will reward you.***

Today, as you sum all of this up, a generous giver stewards resources from the Lord to bless others. And we are hoping for some in here... This is going to be key. Some of you need to hear this next one. If you have never participated in the offering at Woodland Hills Family Church, start this month with something.

About 20 years ago, the church was young, we were just getting started. A business owner in our town came to know the Lord. I met him at Bob Evans for some discipleship time, and we know that all life change happens at Bob Evans or Cracker Barrel – two great places for that. I'll never forget my friend sitting down. He was older than me. He sat down and he put an envelope right there on the table. I could tell that it was a check envelope. I could tell he was proud. He was ready to give. He was a brand-

new believer. No one had ever instructed him, no one had ever shown him in the scripture anything about giving. Here was his first question to me. He got kind of poking me a little bit. He goes, "First of all, I want to know how much you and Amy give?" I usually don't announce that, but I was feeling a little... So, I told him. I gave him the amount that we give every month. I think it was the very month part that threw him. But as soon as I stated the amount, I knew immediately that amount was more than what was in that check. You saw it all over him. Then he asked, "You do that ever month?" I said, "We start with a tithe and then we kind of move on from there." And I shared a lot of what we shared today. I had to stop him and say, "First of all, I want to say thank you that this is in your heart. You've been a believer for how long? Days if not just weeks. But you knew this was something you wanted to participate in."

So, we walked through stewardship, and we walked through you are a manager, it's 100% God's, he gives you the very breath you take. He's the creator and sustainer of life and all that you have is his and when we give, it's recognizing that we are stewards. I said, "I'm going to take this. I'm not going to open it, I'm going to hand it to the people who count money, and this is between you and the Lord."

For some of you, you've never participated in the offering and guess what? We are inviting you today to participate. Because we want you to be a part of all that God's doing here in our church, in our community, and around the world.

If you already give, the question I want you to ask today as you leave is are you giving sacrificially? What excites you more? Buying your second home or increasing your giving. Hear me. You can buy a second home. Some of you have second homes. There's nothing about... If Paul didn't do it, we're not doing it. There is nothing about guilt, there's nothing under compulsion today. There is no fear or emotional appeal, we want you to give what you have decided in your heart between you and the Lord, to give. And ask yourself the question, what can be adjusted in your life that allows you to be an even more generous giver?

With all that said, as part of our worship, we take an offering at Woodland Hills Family Church. There are four ways you can give. There are offering boxes located in the foyer, some of you are scrounging around for a single or two right now. We don't need the counters to look like bartenders at the end of a shift, counting singles and fives. Don't give out of guilt. Take this week, think about it, pray about it. What's your giving going to be? You can give through the Church Center app. Hit "give online now" at woodhills.org. And just so you know, about 70% of our giving at Woodland Hills comes through online. And you can text any amount to 84321. And we say thank you, Woodland Hills. I can't say it enough. Thank you for your generosity.

Father, for the one that's never placed faith in Jesus, that today would be the day they understand that Jesus gave his life for them and now we are called, as we receive Christ as Savior, to give our lives our away for Christ and others. I pray a blessing over this church, as you have blessed us financially, that we would meet the needs, that we as a church would be able to say there are no needy among us, just as the First Century Church did. What a blessing that we would meet the real needs of people, that not one person is going hungry in this church today.



For the missionaries and the ministries that we support, continue to bless our church that we can be a blessing and continue to send people out. Thank you for blessing the businesses and the jobs and the careers in this church. We receive it as stewards, it's all yours. And we want to give generously and sacrificially. We pray all of this in the authority of the name of Jesus and everyone agreed and said... Amen.