

# A Generous Spirit // Gospel, #6 // John 15:12-15; 1 Timothy 6:17-19

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## DBAP Recap:

- Give God a hand? 7200 attendance/right at 300 for baptism
- High: Allie being baptized
- Low: Ryah
- Snapshot of stories
  - Sheer diversity: black, white, Hispanic; Asian; Middle Eastern; young, old
  - Under house arrest baptized with the ankle bracelet: 3 weeks ago tried to commit suicide
  - Iraqi refugee. Baptized by a guy who had served in the US military and came to Christ while on a tour of duty in an Islamic country.
  - Several unwed mothers; one who came through PSS...
- What I was most encouraged by: Seeing people bring others
  - Statistically it goes up
  - People baptizing people from their small groups
- Intercessory faith: believing God on behalf of our community. You did, and Jesus showed up to pour out His compassion.
- Could we one more time thank Him? And let us renew ourselves again to this great task: **Matthew 9:37-38**, *It says that when Jesus looked upon the multitudes He had compassion on them because they were weary and wandered about like sheep with no shepherd. And he tells us to ask Him to send us out effectively to them.*

## Wheel:

- Metric for measurement. “How are you doing spiritually?” How’s you’re wheel?”
- A theme running through John 15 is one of generosity.

**John 15:12-13**, *“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. [13] Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.*

- *The mark* that you have experienced the gospel is that you possess of generosity of spirit. The love of God for us produces a love for others in us. Period.
- Many of us grew up in traditions that identified certain signs that God was in you.
  - Some traditions it was a Spirit baptism: did you have this moment where you hair stood up on the back of your neck and you got goose bumps and spoke in a tongue—that was the sign you had filled with Jesus.
  - For others of us, the sign was that we started to conform to rules. You started to want to look and dress like a character on the Andy Griffith show.
    - If you were a guy, when Jesus came into your heart, you cut your hair. If you were a girl you quit wearing skinny jeans (which probably wasn’t a bad idea).
    - You started to hate beer.
    - Tattoos magically disappeared off of your body.
    - Girls could have one earring in each ear; guys, none at all.
    - You started to vote Republican. You started to hate the pagan jungle beat rock music and love the Gaither Vocal Band. You loved potluck dinners and preferred Old King James English. These were the signs that you loved Jesus.
  - Well that was all, of course, or at least mostly, ridiculous.

- ***The mark that you have experienced the gospel is love for others, particularly other believers.***

The Apostle John says this in another place: **1 John 3:14-18**, “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we (what?) love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death...”

- It’s not how much we went to church that shows if we have the gospel, but how we talked about each other after church that shows whether or not the gospel has changed us.

**By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us,**

- How did we know the love of God? Through carefully articulated doctrines? Did God let us know His love by slapping down a systematic theology text with careful descriptions of His love and attributes?
- Not here. Here we knew it by His laying down of His life for us. It made the invisible real, and tangible.

**and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.**

- Because that’s how others will know God’s love as well.

**[17] But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?**

- How can we possibly follow a Jesus who saw our condition, took pity on us, left heaven and came to earth to die a tortured death in our place, and then see someone suffering and just turn away?
- Inconceivable!

**[18] Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.”**

Christian love is not just a doctrine to be articulated; it is a lifestyle to be pursued.

- At this church, our witness needs explanation, and demonstration.
- **Without explanation, our message has no clarity**
  - “I live out the gospel. I don’t verbally explain it, I just live it out. That’s like watching a news broadcast with the sound turned down. **Statement attributed to Francis of Assisi: ‘Preach the gospel; if necessary use words.’** How do you do that? **Without explanation, our message has no clarity.**
- **Without generosity, our message has no power.** These two things always go together: the preaching of the gospel with our mouths, and the demonstration of the gospel with our lives. The preaching gives it clarity; the generosity gives it power.
  - Sometimes churches like ours are good at the preaching part, but not so good at the demonstrating part.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> part of the Gospel Prayer. I pray daily, and it is very challenging to me. **Gospel prayer, part 3: “As You have been to me, so I will be to others.”**

Today... I want to show you why the gospel produces a generous spirit. Let’s go to another place... got to be the clearest place in the Bible...

**1 Timothy 6:17-19**

- Now, I need you, as much as possible, to separate this issue from giving to the church. That’s not what this is about. This is a heart issue, of just responding to the gospel. **This issue of generosity is mentioned 2285x in the Bible; hope is mentioned 185 times, faith 246 times, love 733 times; generosity: 2285 times. What does that tell you? Tells you this is important.**
- And if you can’t hear this because you think this is about getting your money for the church, put that out of your mind. I’ve said this before, and I mean it... If you feel like the church is always

asking you for money, give it somewhere else. Really. I'm much more concerned about you just being generous than about you giving here. You just being generous in response to the gospel is a much more important issue. God will take care of us.

- So can we separate this issue of generosity from giving to the church? Can we punt it? I want this to be about your response to the gospel, not about our church needing money. If you have any hesitation at all, don't give it to the church. Just be generous somewhere.

**1 Timothy 6, Paul gives the best grid in the whole Bible for us to think about our money. It's awesome. You ready?**

***“As for the rich in this present age,***

- Let's stop here because some of you immediately think, “Well, this passage is not for me, because I'm not rich.”
  - Here's a little sociological insight about Americans. Nobody in America thinks they're rich. Rich is always one or two levels above you. Right? Saw a fascinating **Gallup poll** the other day.
    - They asked people who had a household income of \$30,000 what income would make you “rich.” *Answer: \$75,000.* People who make 30K thought 75 made you rich.
    - *...\$50,000 what income would make you rich, and the answer was \$100,000.*
    - *The most commonly given answer in America to what income qualified you as rich was \$120,000. Except, of course, for the people who make 120K, and then what makes you rich is to be in the 200K range.*
  - **A little perspective here:** If you earn \$37,000/yr you are in the top 4% of the wage earners in the world. 96% of the world is poorer than you are. If you have \$45,000/yr, you are in the top 1%.
    - This article talked about *Bill Gates visiting India... He talked to a lady in a village. After he left, reporter asked the old lady if she knew that the man who just left was the richest man in the world, and she responded, “Everyone who visits from the west is Rich.” If you had been the next person to visit her, she would have put you in the same category with Bill Gates.*
  - The point is that it's all a matter of perspective. When you compare us, even the poorest of us, to other societies around the world, we definitely qualify as rich. You go on a mission trip, and then you come back and think about what is “normal” here:
    - ***Many of you have remodeled some part of your house.*** Try explaining that to a person in another culture. Yes, I had a perfectly functional part of my house but I didn't like how it looked, it was so 1995, so I ripped up a perfectly good section of my house and re-did it.
    - I took a fully functional sofa and I put it out on the curb and got a new one. And the person from the other culture is like, “Wait, you don't sit on the floor?”
    - You have “leftovers” in your refrigerator, and when you eat that you feel like it is a proof of your frugality. Stop and consider: you have LEFTOVERS. So much food at a meal you couldn't eat it all.
    - You have a garage... and they are like, “Wait, you have a whole house, just for your car.”
    - How about one of those things in the middle of your sink that goes.... And you put stuff in it. What do you call that? A “garbage disposal”
    - How about “storage units.” Stuff you don't need but don't know what to do with yet.
- So let's keep this in perspective. It applies to you.

- Let me use this first phrase to deal with another objection: There's some thinking out right now that basically says that "Churches that take Jesus seriously won't have any rich people.... Because people who love Jesus will give all their money away."
  - *Based on this passage, that can't be true. If there were no rich people in this church, there would be no need for the warning here.*
  - God expects all of His followers to be generous, but that doesn't mean some of them are not still rich even after being generous. Hannah's prayer, in 1 Samuel 2:7 says, "The Lord makes poor and makes rich." God makes some people rich.

***Here's what Paul says to rich people. This is the best description in the Bible, imo, about what gospel-centered generosity looks like in action.***

***First, he tells you two things to not do with money:***

***charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God,***

1. Don't be haughty with it (or, don't find significance in it)
    - Money very quickly becomes the measure of our status and our value. Money allows individuals to gain access to things by which others may not have access. (Others would love to live in your neighborhood, but they can't. Drive your kind of car; wear your kind of clothing, but they can't. And you start to think that your worth, your significance is directly related to your financial status. Paul says, "Don't do that.")
  2. Don't find security in it (see? Don't set your hopes on it). Many of us base the security of our future on our bank account or financial plan.
    - The idea of losing your retirement; making a bad investment or business deal; having your identity stolen; losing your job: these are devastating thoughts.
    - Or maybe you feel like your future is so secure financially that you don't even worry about it.
- Two problems with these ways of thinking:
    - **Money is uncertain**
      - Even the most secure plan is not foolproof.
      - And what happens when you get a call from the doctor; marriage is in trouble; kids are wild.
      - God knocks some things down...
      - Money can buy you a 5K mattress; but not rest; it can buy you a gorgeous house, but not a loving home; it can send you on great vacations, but it can't give family harmony; it can buy you toys but not fulfillment; it can send your kids to private school but not make them wise; it can help you retire comfortably but not with peace with God.
    - **It is false worship.**
      - God is supposed to be your security and significance. #1 competitor for our souls in the Bible is MONEY!
      - Money, more than anything else, calls out for us to find our significance and security within them.
      - **Prov. 18:11** *"The wealth of the rich is their fortified city"*
        - God is supposed to do that.
      - Jesus said, **Matthew 6:24**, *"You cannot serve God and money."*

- Scare you... most of you, just about every decision you've made relates to money! Education; the job you take...
- Just listen to how Jesus talks with people in the Gospels! Riches are what keep more people from heaven than just about anything.
  - Matthew 19: "Easier for a camel to go through an eye of a needle than a rich man..."
  - Mark 4: Jesus talks about the seed of God's word that falls on soil that receives it but then, He says, "The deceitfulness of riches" spring up and choke out the seed of life.
    - Which of these two statements create the most anxiety in you: "God is displeased with you." "There is no money in the bank." **Be honest.**
  - And here's the thing the richer you get, the more danger you are in!
  - **1 Timothy 6:9** *But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. [10] For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils.*
  - You've worked for money. Some of you love it. And Jesus warns you that you can't love it and follow Him. You'll say that you follow Him, and you'll think you are, but money captivates the affections of your heart more than God does; you obey money more than you obey Him.
  - Here's what study after study has shown: *The more people make, the harder it is to give.* Rich people, percentage wise, give less than poor people.
    - Christians in Durham: people who make less than 100K give twice as much, percentage wise, as people who make over 100K.
    - Christians in America give, percentage-wise, less than they did in the Great Depression. Christians in America give less than Christians in Africa.<sup>1</sup>
  - The more you get money the more it entangles the affections and trust of your heart. God ceases to be your city and money becomes that.
    - When you make 18K, you gave 10% b/c you thought you needed God.
    - C. S. Lewis: wealth has a way of knitting a man's heart...
  - If you're not terrified by this, you're not listening. What is your God?

Paul says, "Don't trust in it! Don't delight in it more than God. Don't let the fear of the future keep you from obeying God."

That's what you're not to do with money.

Here's what you are to do.

**who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.**

- Enjoy it. It's a blessing. God is glorified by gifts. Me with my kids. Kharis' bike & Ryah's dress. Outback steak.

**[18] They are to do good,**

- Your money was given to you as a tool for blessing. That's the reason God gave some of us a lot, so we could love and bless richly, like He does.

**to be rich in good works,**

- This is great play-on-words: God gave to us richly. We should give to others richly.

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<sup>1</sup> These come from a study on "Generosity Globally and in Durham" done by Durham Cares. Available at [www.durhamcares.org](http://www.durhamcares.org).

- **Are you rich in good works?** How do I know that? I give some... Compare how you live to how you give.
  - If I looked at what you drive in, dress in, live in, and compared it to what you gave, which of those two would I say is “richly.” Are you living richly, or giving richly?
  - I don’t have a problem with a guy driving a 60K automobile. I really don’t. If they are giving richly.
    - In other words, if the drives a 60K automobile and gave away 10K to God’s mission/the church last year, he is “living richly” not “giving away richly.”
    - However, if he is giving richly and has enough left and chooses to drive a 60K automobile, then he might be simply enjoying God’s good gifts, which Paul says he is able to do.
    - **Warning:** A lot of people see the 60K automobile and immediately judge them; no way a real Christian could drive that. That attitude is just a matter of perspective. As I showed you at the beginning, you live in unbelievable luxury based on most people around the world’s standards. If you eat 3 meals a day and anything above rice and beans you’re living the high life by most people’s standards, so don’t start judging by a standard you don’t want to be judged with. We all resent the people who are one or two levels above us; and the Christian version of that is to judge them for where they live or where they drive.
  - My question is simply if I compared how you give and how you live, which one is “richer.” If you live richly but give meagerly, I am having a hard time seeing how you are really “following” Jesus.
- **Live sufficiently; give richly!** Enjoy what God has given to you, but do so from the perspective that you are first going to give richly first.
  - **Luke 6:38** “Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.”
    - “I am afraid that the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare.” –C.S. Lewis. Have you given to a place where you feel nervous?
  - **For many years Christians have taught something called “tithing.”** It’s an OT thing. You gave the first of your crops back to God.
    - I understand the whole principle... it’s a very complex question (different legal codes, etc) so we don’t preach tithing here as a law, b/c we are no longer under law. But the laws of the OT are guides. And giving the firstfruits of your labor to God and His work is a biblical principle.
      - (Again: “You’re just saying this to get our money.” I mean what I said: give it somewhere else... If you don’t believe in what we’re doing here or trust us, give it somewhere you do. This is a principle between you and God, not you and us and God.)
    - Let me tell you why my wife and I do: Poor; missions; reaching our community.
      - HOPUD: I would say we’re the best at ministering to the poor holistically;
      - Missions and church planting
      - We give away 24% and to organizations that we have evaluated.
      - Building, and to expand...
    - If that’s a problem with you, honestly, give it somewhere else. Start with the tithe, and then give beyond it.

**to be generous and ready to share,**

- “Ready to share.” That means to create margin in your life so you can give to a need when one arises.



- All this is pointing you to something very practical: Firstfruit giving that is based on percentage.
  - 2 ways to give: Leftovers vs. firstfruits (initial percentage).
  - Studies of the financial habits of rich people show they do everything off of the top. Save. Give..
- Here's my challenge to you: Figure out what you want to give, and how to get there.
  - One year V and I, to get to our percentage, cut out some things we enjoyed. But we wanted to get to a percentage God had put on our hearts. We're doing that right now on some things.
  - After you've met that goal, live to the max on what you live on! Stretch your dollars as far as they'll go. Enjoy what you love without guilt! You've already given God the firstfruits.
  - *(Let me explain to some of you what you've done: Some of you have gotten yourself into a place where you can't give because there is all these things you feel like you just couldn't live out: "I have to have the finer things..." No. What happened is you got to a place where you could afford them, and now you feel like you have to have them. But before you could afford them, you didn't even know you needed them. There is nothing wrong with buying what you can afford. But do that after you have given richly, and that should be based ahead of time on a percentage you choose to give.*
    - *Again, rich people do everything at the beginning... Give God the firstfruits.*
  - FPU

*[19] thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life."*

- Realizing that there is something better than what money can buy on earth. It's pleasures in eternity.
- The greatest deterrent to our giving is shortsightedness. *"Financial planners tell us, 'When it comes to your money, don't think just three months or three years ahead. Think thirty years ahead.' Christ, the ultimate investment counselor, takes it further. He says, 'Don't ask how your investment will be paying off in just thirty years. Ask how it will be paying off in thirty million years.'"*<sup>2</sup>
- **Illus: Opening worship song at DBAP.** A picture of heaven! You'll enjoy heaven much more... Some of you will die with nothing.

Super generous people don't become generous because they feel guilty. They become so because of a fundamental shift in thinking.

Because of the gospel...

- We don't depend on money for security; we depend on God
- We delight (and find our significance) in God, not money;
- We know God's promises about repaying us manifold
- We understand the connection between the way we manage money in this life and what that means for eternity

Then money begins to lose its grip on them... Generosity starts to flow from their hearts. Naturally. Like a balloon. **Wheel**

- Most of all... they realize what Jesus has done for them: Zinzendorf, founder of massive missionary movement. Grew up rich: as part of his education in high school he was to take a tour of several famous European cities. In the art gallery Dusseldorf he saw Domenico Feti's *Ecce homo*. Jesus with crown of thorns...

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<sup>2</sup> Randy Alcorn, *Treasure Principle*.

“All this I did for thee; what doest thou for me?” Some of you came to college to get rich... but I want you to discover something of greater value; something worth leaving everything for!

### Conclusion:

- Money can't buy you heaven, but it can keep you from it. It can replace God.
- **Very serious question for reflection:** Is Jesus your treasure and your trust, or is it money?

## Bullpen:

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- (2 wrong attitudes:
  - Christians who teach that **our duty is simply 'the tithe.'** Basically like a tax you pay to God and go on... this position, even though so many Christians hold it, is not just wrong, it is unchristian. God never says, “Just give me 10% and then you can go on your merry, self-centered way?” To follow Jesus means you live as He lived. You love others like He has loved you, and you leverage your life for others as He leveraged His for you. Did Jesus tithe His blood for you? Show up, give us 10% of His blood, and move on? That's one wrong attitude.
  - **“You can't be rich and love Jesus.”** So whatever you have, you should give it away because there are always people in the world who need it. As if God was depending on us... like God is sitting in heaven wringing His hands, going, “Oh my gosh, if the church would just give up some of its cash I could get this job done.” I assure you that is not the case. He doesn't need anything we have to get His work done: He can take 5 loaves and 2 fish, multiply it, and send us home with more than we started.)
  - ***Paul doesn't say either of those things.***
  - V and I with cable. Car.
  - “Well, I just like the finer things.” No, you got to a place where you could afford them, and now you feel like you have to have them. Before you could afford them you didn't need them. Decide ahead of time... this is what I'll give; this is what I'll live on.

**When I hear the same message over and over again, I pay attention. For example, in the Bible, hope is mentioned 185 times, faith 246 times, love 733 times, and giving 2285 times. Now that's significant. GIVING is one of the secrets of success.**

### The mission of God

Can you imagine how different the perception of Christianity be if they out-gave everyone else in culture? You can't dislike people who serve you, who come to your rescue, who give toward your needs.

The danger of money: 1 Timothy 6:6-10 [6] But godliness with contentment is great gain, [7] for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. [8] But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. [9] But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. [10] For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.



- Money is the kind of thing you can't take with you but if you misuse it here can significantly affect your eternity.
- "A Christian is a man who expects nothing from this world. He does not pin his hopes on it, because he knows it is doomed." MLJ, 224

Leftovers are not what you give to your guests, but what you eat after guests are gone.

In Christ, I can let go of all that I have because, in Christ, I have all that I need.

- **Zinzendorf:** Count Nicholas von Zinzendorf, a German nobleman who was born into great power and privilege and lived from 1700 to 1760, was one of the founders of the Moravian Church. Over the years he spent his wealth down to practically zero doing good deeds, pouring himself out for others. Why? What happened that motivated him so radically? As a young man of nineteen, he was sent to visit the capital cities of Europe in order to complete his education. One day he found himself in the art gallery of Dusseldorf gazing at Domenico Feti's *Ecce homo*, a portrait of Jesus wearing a crown of thorns. This image of the suffering Lord was very moving to Zinzendorf. Underneath the painting the artist had penned an inscription, words that Jesus might say to any one of us: "All this I did for thee; what doest thou for me?" (Keller, *King's Cross*)

Which of these two statements create the most anxiety in you: "God is displeased with you." "There is no money in the bank."

It makes the unseen love of God real and tangible.