

## **Affording Generosity**

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1 Tim 6:6-19

### **CHILDREN'S TIME**

Have you ever had a visit from the Tooth Fairy? I can remember visits from the Tooth Fairy when I was little, although I never saw her with my eyes.

I heard a story about a little girl named Rachel. Rachel lost several teeth and every time she lost a tooth, the Tooth Fairy brought her two dollars. Two dollars was a lot of money for a little girl Rachel's age and she was very happy with that.

Then, one day Rachel was visiting one of her friends. Her friend told her that she lost a tooth too, and the Tooth Fairy brought her ten dollars!

Rachel had been very happy with the two dollars for each tooth, but after she found out her friend got ten dollars, she wasn't so happy any more. All of a sudden, two dollars was not enough. She wanted more! Don't we feel that way sometimes? God has blessed us with all that we need, but when we see someone else who has

more, we compare what we have with what they have and we are no longer happy.

In the Bible, the Apostle Paul had something to say about that in a letter he wrote to a young man named Timothy. He told Timothy that we can be content with what God has given us. After all, we didn't bring anything with us when we were born, and we can't take anything with us when we die.

People who want to get rich often become greedy, and greed has them want more and more all the time and that can bring a lot of pain into their life and the life of other people. Paul told Timothy that instead of wanting to be rich, people can look for ways to be generous and give to others who have needs.

I don't know how much the Tooth Fairy leaves under your pillow, but I know that God will provide for your needs when you trust God. And if God blesses you with more than you need, then you have a gift you can share with others!

### **SERMON**

#### **READ 1 TIMOTHY 6:6-19**

This passage addresses money, however at a deeper level it addresses something else.

Paul wrote about riches and wealth and how we have brought nothing into the world and can take nothing with us when we die. That puts things in perspective, right? He addresses how love of money leads to all sorts of problems in life. You could say that it rots the heart. It's a path of destruction.

Paul then refocuses our attention on a much better thing on which we can direct our attention, things like: godliness, faith, justice, love, patience, gentleness. These are things much greater than wealth and more worthy of our attention.

When our attention is focused here it brings life to us as individuals, to our church community, and to the world around us. This is nothing new for us, is it. We have heard this many times. Move away from things that distract us from what God wants for us.

But at a deeper level, what Paul is talking about is a redirection of our purpose in being human, our **WHY**.

Simon Sinek gave a remarkably popular TedTalk several years ago titled "How Great Leaders Inspire Action." He made the point that

"people don't buy what you do, they buy **why** you do it."

It sounds pretty straight forward, but the truth is that most of us, including most of our churches, are focused on what we do, not why we do it.

Churches talk about their great children's program or their innovative music program. They might tout the mission trips they take. "Come and join us!" they say. "Look at how responsible we are with our budget. And by the way, we want you to give to help us pay our bills, and fund these great things we are doing."

The only problem is that people are not as much motivated or inspired by what we do as why we do it.

The really important question facing us as a church today, is do we know our **Why**?

Why does this congregation exist? What would be missing in this community if this church wasn't here?

Again, this sounds pretty straight forward, but discovering our why is harder than it might seem.

Think about yourself personally for a minute. Why do you get up in the morning? Why do you go off to

work or school? Why do you go to church? Why does any of it matter?

Have you thought about that?

And as you start praying and listening for God to help you answer that question, let's go a bit deeper. Go deep enough to touch the grace-filled imagination of God. When you get there, you'll know your why.

When you are present to your why, your life will shift and transform. The same can happen to this church when we are clear about our why. Things will crystalize inside the Spirit's leading and people outside the congregation will respond to our declared why.

People will respond not because of what we do, but because of why we do it.

But you might be wondering, what does this have to do with generosity? Everything. In fact, the world around us is transformed when we are generous around our why.

We can give money and time, but it doesn't really mean much or truly matter unless it is given out of our why.

Our why is where we connect with God's work in the world.

Let's think about this church congregation. Why we are here? Why do we do this thing called "church" in Birmingham?

Are we a church because everyone else is doing it? Well, no, because they aren't. It is pretty clear that more people are leaving the church than are going for the first time.

Are we a church because it is what we have always done? That could be your honest answer. It is part of a routine. It is part of your history. It has always been a ritual and priority and you can't imagine life without attending church.

Do we participate with this congregation because we like the people and think that hanging out with them every once in a while is better than not hanging out? Perhaps it prevents you from being lonely and gives you a sense of belonging to something bigger than yourself. That might be a reason you are here.

Or perhaps there could be a big audacious why — a compelling belief, a dream that draws us together to be part of this congregation. What might that be?

What do we believe so strongly about being part of this congregation, that it is more important than anything else that might take our time, energy and money?

Maybe our choice is between the Beverly Hillbillies and Star Trek. Marketing guru Seth Godin used this example not about the church, but I think it fits.

Both of these TV shows debuted more than 50 years ago. The Beverly Hillbillies had the highest ratings for a number of years. Everyone watched it and laughed. In time it was cancelled, and today nobody talks about it much.

Star Trek was also launched in the 1960s, ran for three years and was cancelled due to low viewership, however it shaped the world of technology and the way that we live life, right up to this day.

As a result of the vision of Star Trek's creators, every time we go to the grocery store the doors magically open when get near them. And the smartphone that most of you probably have in your pocket right now, that allows you to talk wirelessly to anyone you want anywhere in the world, is nothing less than the next generation of a Star Trek communicator.

Which do we want to be, the Beverly Hillbillies, a show that everyone loves for a season, but fades into the night, unremembered?

Or Star Trek, the show that had a vision and dream that eventually changed the world?

Does what we do really matter in the world? Is what we do connected to our God-given why, or are we simply going through the motions with activity we think we are supposed to do?

Our congregation can champion any number of causes or issues in the world. As we determine what we will be doing, it helps to be clear about our why and the difference we want to make. Here are three questions to consider regarding our why:

**1. What are we committed to?**

What difference are we committed to making? What values are driving us? What beliefs are influencing us?

**2. What is standing in our way?**

What could prevent us from showing up or stepping up? What is in our way that with our shared awareness we could change or adapt to accommodate?

**3. What can others count on me for?** What do I bring to the community that is unique to me and that I am count-on-able to provide? More broadly, what can the community count on this church to provide?

These questions establish clarity about our commitments, beliefs, and values. They help us to be brave, honest, and real. We can answer them as a congregation and as individuals.

It is not so helpful when we are vague or foggy about why, our dream. We can't move forward as a church if we are not authentic and then generous with our why.

Can we be generous enough to live our why?

It will probably cost us something in terms of time, money, and energy. But if we are truly living our why, we won't be asking the question. It will be completely worth it!

Perhaps the real question is: Can we afford not to be generous with our why?