

## “Extravagant Generosity”

*Five Fruitful Practices, part 5*

*Luke 19:1-10 and 21:1-4*

**[Title slide]** Good morning! This is a beautiful day to be worshipping God together. Would you do me a favor? Turn to the person sitting next to you, and tell them, “I’m glad you’re here with me this morning.” There are so many different places you could be right now. Maybe your mind is even drifting towards those things you could be doing. But we are here now. We are here to learn about God’s love, forgiveness, redemption, and to be challenged to live for Jesus Christ. Let’s start with a word of prayer.

Almighty God, You reign over all of earth and heaven. You fill time and space with Your gracious presence, and You reign eternal. We ask that You fill this church with Your Holy Spirit. Be in our hearts and minds as we worship you. Help us to be unified, just as Jesus Christ prayed for the unity of the whole church on earth. Speak to us. We are ready to listen. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

**[Five Practices]** The last four few weeks, we have discussed the Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations: Radical Hospitality, Passionate Worship, Intentional Spiritual Development, Risk-Taking Mission and Service, and now, today, we tackle the last one, Extravagant Generosity. All these ideas are from a book by Robert Schnase, a bishop in the United Methodist Church, and you are welcome to look up his website, [fivepractices.org](http://fivepractices.org), for more information.

**[UMC purpose]** Bishop Schnase identifies these practices as critical to the church’s mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ who transform the world. He believes, as do I, that if we practice these five things, we will bear fruit in the church.

**[title slide]** Generosity is potentially the most difficult practice to tackle. We don’t like talking about money much, no matter if you are in a church, at work, or at home. Finance, for many, is a taboo topic, but it impacts so much of our lives that we need to bring it out in the open. In the Bible, Jesus mentioned money more often than heaven!

**[Gaslight Club]** Personally, I’m grateful for those who have taught me about money and demonstrated generosity. One of those people was Paul, a senior engineer who used to be my mentor. Paul sort of reminded me of my

grandfather, which might be why I paid attention whenever Paul gave me advice. I will never forget the first time he took me out for lunch at a fancy restaurant called the Gaslight Club. There were two things I remember Paul telling me. Number one: it was his turn to pay, since he had invited me. Number two: the people serving us worked hard and deserved an excellent tip. They would remember us the next time we came back. And he was right.

Here’s the thing: Paul wasn’t even a Christian, and yet the generosity he modeled to me was the same as the Bible teaches. Paul taught me to respect and give generously to other people, using our resources to build relationships.

**[white board question]** Have you known some generous people in your life? Who were they? (*Solicit a few answers.*)

**[quote]** We often think about what our giving does for others, but do we ever think about what giving does for us personally? In his book, Bishop Schnase says, “Churches that practice extravagant generosity do not focus on the church’s need to receive, they focus on the Christian’s need to give.” Generosity is not about the church’s budget, it’s all about our need to become generous people.

That’s what these two bible stories are really about today. Don’t focus on the amounts Zacchaeus or the widow gave; look at how they gave and why.

**[Zacchaeus and Jesus]** Start with Zacchaeus, in Luke 19. Here is a man who many hated for several reasons. He was very rich. Now, you might like to have some rich friends, but Zacchaeus was not a friend of the people. He was a tax collector for the Romans, which made him a traitor. His job was to collect money from the working people and give it to their oppressors.

I imagine Zacchaeus was used to people hating him. Then one day, something changed. Zacchaeus heard someone famous was coming to town, Jesus. He didn’t know anything else about him. Luke 19:3 says he was trying to see “who Jesus was.” Was he a miracle worker? A prophet? All Zacchaeus wanted was a glimpse. He climbed up into the sycamore tree, not expecting anyone to notice. He just wanted to be there when Jesus passed by.

It’s funny how we are like that, too. We just want a glimpse of Jesus, but not too close. Yet something happened to Zacchaeus, something that I wish would happen to all of us. Zacchaeus got more than a glimpse. Jesus became a

guest in his home. Jesus wasn't just stopping in for lunch, he entered Zacchaeus's life. And as a result, Zacchaeus felt something he had never felt before. He felt joy. He was thrilled Christ noticed him. And this joy awoke a need within himself. He knew, without asking, what needed to be done. He needed to give to express his joy and show how Jesus had changed him.

**[Bible verse]** The others were still angry. They were mad at Zacchaeus and Jesus. They were saying, “Zacchaeus is a crook! He's a traitor! He's a sinner! Jesus shouldn't be there.” Jesus didn't defend Zacchaeus. He let Zacchaeus answer for himself. This is what the rich man said: “Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.” (Luke 19:8) Zacchaeus knew the right thing to do. And all it took was an encounter with Jesus Christ to get him to do it.

I love this story because of the total change that comes over Zacchaeus. This is the type of transformation we yearn to see in everyone as Jesus comes into their lives. Zacchaeus gave because of Christ's presence in his life. His giving was an act of worship, a testimony of what God did for him.

**[hands, flowers]** As Christians, we have a need to give. Practicing generosity is a spiritual discipline, as important as worshipping, praying, witnessing, serving, being baptized and receiving communion.

However, generosity is not just about the amount we give. You can give lots of money and still miss the point. That's part of our second story in Luke 21, about the widow in the temple.

**[Boxes in temple]** The widow was putting her offering in the temple boxes Jerusalem. There were 13 of these boxes, with little horns sticking up to drop the coins in. Now, these offerings were *supposed* to be a secret. You could give as little or as much as you liked, but everyone would still hear the coins rattling around as they fell in. The rich men were dropping in loads of money, listening to it rattle, and bragging about how generous they were. The widow only put in two pennies, but it was all she had. Her desire to worship God was illustrated in her generosity. She gave God everything. And Jesus praised her for it. It wasn't about show, it was about heart.

So what? Zacchaeus and the widow were generous. What does that mean for us? If we recognize our need to give, then we should understand that God expects us to give proportionally, as well. Zacchaeus gave 50%. The woman gave 100%. Why do you give what you give? Is it intentional, or just an afterthought?

**[Bible verse]** People give to what they believe in. Matthew 6:21 says, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Money can either be a topic of hurt, disparity and frustration, or it can be a blessing, a rallying point, and a feeling of satisfaction.

**[Bible verse]** The simple fact is, how we use our money reveals our priorities. God asks us to make him our priority. Listen to Malachi 3:10:

“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.”

Giving, specifically proportional giving and tithing, is a spiritual discipline. And it is possible for everyone to do it. However, we need to start somewhere. Start by calculating the percentage of your income you currently give. Ask God to show you how to use the wealth He has given you. We are stewards of all that God has given us. A tithe, ten percent, is a good, biblical goal, something that we can all pray about and strive for. I realize, some people will give more, some people will give less. Some calculate it pre-tax, others post-tax. Whatever! The important thing is, know what your goal is.

I have practiced the tithe since my first job. I tithe because I believe God is faithful, and I have seen how God has opened the floodgates of heaven over my family. I also know that none of us would be here today if previous generations had not been faithful and tithed. This church would not be here. The ministries we provide would not exist: Camp Michigamme. Children’s Church. The church Nursery. Vacation Bible School. Our Youth Group. Our College Group. Our Scholarships. Weddings. Funerals. Little Brothers Meals. Christmas Eve services. Small groups. Counseling. Prayer groups. Even the stained-glass windows, carpets, pews and the wooden cross are here because of people who believed in

the power of the Holy Spirit in this place. Your generosity can encourage others and build up the church. People who are generous give not only their money, but their time, their talents, their service, and their prayers.

**[Jesus and Zacchaeus]** If you encounter Jesus Christ, you will find you have a need to give. It is a part of our walk with God, part of our hospitality, worship, discipleship, and mission. Go ahead and read your Bible every day, pray constantly, fellowship with others, even say you are a Christian, but if you don't have a plan to practice generosity, you are missing out on the fullest life God has for you.

Test God in this. See if God's word is true. Bring the whole tithe into God's house. See if God does throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it. I promise you, you won't be disappointed.

**[Faith Promise Cards]** For the next three weeks, you are invited to take part in a church-wide stewardship campaign as we consider what selfless giving really looks like. As you leave today, you will be given an envelope. Inside is an explanation about stewardship and a Faith Promise Card we invite you to fill out. These cards can be returned to the offering plates at any time this month. These cards will be used to encourage everyone in the church, even those who have never given anything to our ministries. It's a chance to put your treasure and your heart together, to become an extravagantly generous person.

**[title slide]** Consider how you want to be known. Consider how you want Grace United Methodist Church to be known. If each and every one of us commits to our mission and purpose, God will bless us abundantly. We will bless each other. We will bless the world. We will be fruitful, because we will invite, worship, study, serve, and give together. We will be a fruitful church, and God will get all the glory. I truly believe that. And I hope you do, as well.

Let's pray.

Memory Verse:

**2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 9:11a** - “You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity.”

Reflection questions:

1. What was the best gift someone ever gave you? Why was it your favorite?
2. What’s the most fun you’ve ever had giving money? What made the experience meaningful?
3. How have you benefited from someone’s generosity? How has our church and community benefited?
4. What does the Bible say about money? Do you believe it?
5. Why do you give what you give? Have you practiced proportional giving? Why or why not?