

Message Notes November 1st, 2020
The Good and Beautiful Community Week 8: The Generous Community
(Psalm 24:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8:13-15, 9:7; Acts 20:35)

- **The Wheel of Life**

- I just started working with a Coach who's giving me and a group of other pastors some guidance in our spiritual lives and our leadership. (I'm really excited to work with him, he was one of my favorite professors at seminary who happens to be both an Old Testament Scholar and a spiritual/life coach. How interesting is that combination?) Anyway, he gave us something cool to work on: it's called, "The Wheel of Life."
- The purpose of this tool is to help you identify what your values are for the core parts of your life and to evaluate how you're currently doing in those areas. It's a circle with eight slices representing these core areas of life, each with a scale from zero to ten. The 8 categories are: *your spiritual life, your physical health, your emotional health, your family, your friends, your recreation, your finances, and your work.*
- This is a really great exercise, because it helps you with two things: first, it helps you see your overall well-being and where you might need to make changes. But it also helps you identify what your underlying values really are, because before you can gauge these eight areas on the scale, you have to think about, "What would a ten be for me in each of these areas, and why?"
- Ultimately, the ideal of the life wheel is to have as balanced and full of a circle as possible: because if any one of these areas is struggling, it will eventually affect the other areas. For example, if you're pouring into your spiritual life, but you're totally neglecting your physical health, there's going to eventually be some issues that affect every one of those areas!
- Think about your life right now: how is your "wheel of life" looking? Is it fairly balanced, fairly full going around? Is there a major dip in one area that needs attention? Is it kind of shriveled and weak, like, "Every category is a five or lower for me right now, things are not so good,"?
- Here's the important point: Do you know that Jesus doesn't just care about the "spiritual" part of the circle, but he cares about the *whole thing*? Do we remember that Jesus doesn't just want us to give him say over one "piece of the pie," but He wants *all* of it? That's what it means to be an apprentice of Jesus, a disciple. When we say, "Jesus is Lord," we really mean it.

- **Evaluate Your Values**

- Now, this was a roundabout way of introducing a specific theme today: *generosity*. The Good and Beautiful Community of the Church is a *generous community*. We're called to live *generous* lives, right? I don't know anyone who would disagree with that. However, I do know there are many who agree with it in principle, but never really take steps to implement it in their lives.
- So, let's zone in on the "finance" piece of the Life Wheel. Generosity has to do with a lot more than just our financial resources, and we'll talk about that, but since most of us associate generosity with finances first, let's talk about that part.
- If you were working on this Wheel of Life, on a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your satisfaction with this dimension of your life right now—your finances and resources? Is it on the higher side, the lower side, or somewhere right in the middle? And the deeper question is, *what would a 10 look like, realistically, for you in this area? What would it look like for you to be thriving, living your ideal life in the realm of finances and resources? Why?* Think about that.
- If you can envision what your ideal goals are for your financial life, you can discover what your values actually are in this area: *what values undergird your sense of living well financially?*
- And here's the clincher: *How much are those values influenced by the Kingdom of God?*
- Does that hit you? My sense is that when many of us ask the question, "What values determine my finances? What is the ideal I'm pursuing?" we often look primarily to the general values of society around us.
- If we're thinking of just the values we inherit from the world when it comes to finances, it might be things like this: *What I have is mine to do what I want with. What I have is what I've earned. Whatever everyone else has, or says you should have, is what I should have too. If I earn more,*

I should get more; if my resources increase, then my standard of living should increase. Living well means having better stuff and never having to worry. Whatever society says is the best standard of living, I should seek that at all costs, even if I have to overextend myself to get there. As far as I can tell, that's pretty much how our society views it. And not all of those things are necessarily bad—some of them are, but not all.

- **Kingdom Values**

- But, what about the values of Jesus? What are the Kingdom values that God would want us to live by with our finances and resources? What is “living well” in God’s eyes? Let’s just come back to this idea of “Generosity” for starters.
- In Acts 20 that was read today, Paul says to the leaders of the Ephesian Church as he is about to depart from them, *“In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”*
 - Is generosity one of the values that determines how you live? Is generosity one of the values that influences the financial goals you set for yourself and your family?
 - Most people measure their blessedness by their *standard of living*, but Scripture tells us to measure it by our *standard of giving*. Most people’s financial goals are primarily focused on increasing their standard of living—with no limit, as much as you can earn, that’s how big you can live—but the Kingdom value is to focus your life on increasing your *standard of giving*.
 - “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Is that in our hearts? Is it a core value we believe in or is it just somewhere in the background?
 - What I’m asking is, *do you want to live a generous life?* And the truth is, if you want to be a follower of Jesus, you don’t really have an option. So, the next question is, *how?* How do we live a generous life?

- **Kingdom Stewardship**

- The Kingdom value is not that we would necessarily seek to become rich or seek to become poor as an end in itself, but that we would learn to be Godly Stewards of whatever we’ve been given.
 - The keyword of the world’s values is *mine*. *My house, my kids, my job, my stuff, my money, my talents, my time, my body*. The keyword of the Kingdom’s values is *His*.
 - Psalm 24:1 “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it...” 1 Corinthians 6 “...You are not your own, you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.”
 - One of the biggest attitudes that gets in the way of living a generous life is a sense of entitlement and ownership that keeps us from realizing *we are stewards of these lives*. God wants us to view everything as a gift—and to enjoy it!—and realize that we are not *owners* but *stewards*. The resources are God’s, we just get the privilege of being a conduit God uses to bless others.
 - A citizen of God’s Kingdom with a stewardship mindset says, *“This is the domain God has given me. How can I use my time, talents, and treasures to live generously with the people under my care, generously with the Body of Christ, and generously with the world around me?”*
- 2 Corinthians 8, where Paul is challenging the believers to use their wealth to help a desperate need in the church of Jerusalem, gives a great example of all this. It says, “...They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us...” It says, “...you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that through his poverty you might become rich.” And it says, “...if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have. Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality, as it is written: ‘The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little.’”
 - The values of Kingdom Stewardship are not that we would give under compulsion or law, but that we would freely and joyfully give just as we have been freely given to by our Lord. It’s that those who have been blessed with more would give so that those who have less can simply live. The person that lives in God’s Kingdom knows they have been *blessed to be a blessing*.

- And, of course, when we come “full circle,” we realize that this is not just about our finances. Living generously can apply to every part of your life, to the whole “wheel of life.” We are stewards of our time, our talents, and our treasures—all of these are God’s gifts for God’s glory.
 - We have the choice of whether or not we’ll be generous or stingy with our time and relationships, generous or stingy with our talents and treasures, generous or stingy with our love for others.
- So, once again, the question is, *how do we learn to live a generous life?* There is an easy-to-miss secret to living a generous life that anyone who lives generously has implemented, whether they know it or not.

- **Simplicity and Margin**

- When you think about the most generous, big-hearted people you’ve met, do know the secret to their lifestyles? *They have something called margin.*
 - Notice how the values of the world are always telling us to get *more*, to do *more*, to max everything out: we max out our schedules, our activities, our calendars; we max out our budgets, our credit, our debts; we max out our houses (our diets!). *More and more and more.* The obvious, yet easy-to-miss fact is this: *you can’t live generously if you have nothing left to give!*
 - Now, you might be maxed-out because you have less than others, because you’ve been strapped with extra burdens or fallen on hard times: you might be doing the best you can do to take care of your family with what you have and that’s what you’re called to do right now. That’s ok! Stay faithful and true, trust God to provide your daily bread and bless you in ways you can’t foresee. But, so many American families, I think, are maxed out because we’ve bought into the value system of *more and more and more.* And ironically, *it cripples our ability to really live well.*
 - Those who live most generously aren’t necessarily those who have the most: I’ve heard of people with six-figure salaries, yet who are drowning in debt and living paycheck to paycheck because their living *maxed-out.* I’ve heard of people who we might consider poor, yet are the first to give to others. You need to find margin in your life if you want to live generously.
- Scripture teaches this principle: I looked up the word “generosity” in the New Testament and I found out that the Greek word translated “generosity” actually means, “*simplicity*”. In the New Testament times, it was assumed that if you wanted to live *generously*, you needed to live with simplicity and contentment, so that instead of using your wealth to live more and more extravagant lifestyles, you could use it to live with wisdom and generosity.
 - John Wesley famously said that Christians should be people who work all they can, to earn all they can, so they can *give* all they can.
 - Have you ever thought about the concept of setting a cap on your lifestyle so that you can use any excess to invest wisely and give generously?
 - My father-in-law is an amazing inspiration in this area to me: I could go into all kinds of details of his life story in where he came from to where he is. But, basically, he and Emily’s mom decided early in their family that they would be content with a certain lifestyle for their home and their kids, so that anything excess could be invested wisely and given generously.
- The key to being generous is finding margin and the key to finding margin is seeking simplicity and contentment. This isn’t a fixed rule or law. It may look different for everyone. The point is, how do you steward the time, talents, and treasures of God in order to live generously and bless others? Would you consider living more simply so that others can simply live?
 - “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Let’s give the *whole pie*, the *whole wheel of life* to Jesus. Let’s let him determine our deepest values. Because, ultimately, as we approach the table of Communion, we remember that *generosity* is central to our story and our redemption. Let’s turn our focus to the extravagant generosity of God now as we celebrate the Lord’s Supper.