

THREE APPROACHES TO LIVING AND GIVING**LUKE 10:25-37**

Giving time, talent, and tithe to the Lord isn't always something everyone wants to hear about. There's a story of a fiery preacher who was working hard one Sunday morning trying to inspire his congregation. He thundered, "This church must get up and walk!" Someone out in the audience responded, "Amen, pastor! Let her walk!" Encouraged by this response, the preacher shouted, "This church must get up and run!" Back came the response, "Amen! Let her run! Preach on, pastor!" Hitting his full stride now, the preacher bellowed, "More than that, this church needs to fly!" "Preach it, pastor, let her fly! Amen!" By now the preacher was at his full oratorical power, "Brothers and sisters, it takes money to make a church get up and fly!" Well, then there was this uncomfortably long and awkward pause before everyone in the congregation heard this hesitant, less enthusiastic response, "Amen.... Let her walk."

During the month of August, we've been taking a journey through a message series I've entitled *The Genius Of Generosity*. I borrowed the title from a little book by Chip Ingram who made this insightful observation. "If you want to be smart, spend carefully. If you want to be wise, save regularly. If you want to be a genius, give generously." That truth is counter intuitive. It seems like the opposite should be true. In other words, it sounds like making all the money you can and then keeping it all for yourself is the surest way to security and happiness. But that's wrong. Neither security nor happiness is ever produced by money. Instead, when we learn to give of our time, talent, and tithe to the Lord, we put ourselves right smack in the middle of all kinds of blessings God wants to give to His children. If you live and give your own way, you block the blessing God wants to give you. If you live and give God's way, you invite His blessing. That's why learning how to give generously is a mark of true, spiritual genius.

Today I want to share with you a few observations based on Jesus' parable about the good Samaritan. It's a very familiar story, but today I want to share with you a slightly different interpretation of it that I heard sometime ago as it relates to living and giving. So, today's message isn't my creation; nevertheless, it's something we all need to hear. Let's read the story again. A Jewish man made a journey from Jerusalem to Jericho. The road between those two cities went through a rough, sparsely populated area that became a favorite spot for thieves to mug and rob travelers. That's what happened to the man in Jesus' story. He was ambushed, beaten up, robbed, and left for dead. As he lay there on the side of the road slowly dying, a priest and a Levite came along. They both saw the man in his great need. They both refused to help him in any way. But then, a man from the region of Samaria came upon this injured Jew. It's important to remember that Samaritans and Jews hated each other intensely at this point in history. Nevertheless, this Samaritan man rescued this very needy Jewish man. He cleaned him up, put him on his donkey, and took him to the nearest Hampton Inn to get healed up. He even paid his bill in full! Jesus' story presented people who have one of three different approaches to living and giving. The first group in Jesus' story were the thieves. Who are they? Simply put, they are...

THE TAKERS.

Their approach to live could be verbalized like this: “What is yours belongs to me and I will take it.” Takers reveal themselves when it comes to giving time, talent, and tithe to the Lord. Takers don’t give any time to serve the Lord. Takers don’t give any personal effort and energy to the Lord’s work. Instead, they’re happy to take the time offered by others. Takers don’t invest their talents or abilities in the Lord’s work. Instead, they benefit from the talents and abilities of others. Either they’ve concluded they have nothing to offer, or they just don’t want to offer anything of themselves to the Lord and His work. They’re perfectly content to let everyone else volunteer to be a part of our welcome team, or to teach our kids in church school or during the service, or pray with people facing problems, or help out in our livestream ministry, or participate in a disciplinemaking triad, or fix and maintain the building on Tuesday mornings, or provide one of our ministries. Do you know how you can spot a taker? Takers are always and forever on the receiving end of ministry. Now takers are found in every walk of life. Here’s another way to spot a taker. After you’ve been with them for any length of time, you feel depleted and exhausted. Why? Because takers just take, and take, and take, and never give back. They’re like a human black hole. Nothing ever comes back.

Tithing is incomprehensible to a taker. Some takers conclude they’re just too financially insecure to ever give 10% of their income to the Lord. In reality, many takers practice a life of chronic indebtedness that has them enslaved to their credit cards. A taking mentality isn’t about how much money you have or make. It’s about your attitude toward money and the giving of yourself. Whatever the excuse, takers are perfectly content to let everyone else pay for the ministries the church provides. They enjoy the building but never think about who has to pay for the lights, the heat, and the upkeep. They’re content to call on the church’s staff to meet their needs, but feel no obligation to help pay their salaries. Takers have concluded everyone else but them should help buy supplies for our different ministries. Takers are oblivious to the fact that our collective financial gifts as well as our giving of time and talent sustain a year in and year out ministry to those who don’t know Jesus yet and help those who do know Him become better disciples.

Recently, I saw a report of last year’s financial giving to our church. Our last fiscal year which was July 2020 – June 2021, we received a total of \$666,930 in giving for our general expenses. We spent \$668,319 which left a small deficit of \$1,389. We were able to cover that small deficit with our savings. In addition, we received a total of \$76,621 for missions and we sent \$65,865 to a variety of missionaries and mission efforts. Given the upheaval of the pandemic, I believe this congregation is to be strongly commended for your faithfulness and generosity. Thank you and bless you for your giving! And, above all, we praise the Lord who inspires and sustains all generosity.

How do you react to that report? Here’s how a taker thinks. “Pretty good news! The church seems to be doing just fine. I don’t really need to think about increasing my giving or getting anywhere near the tithe.” If the opposite were true, how would a taker

react to the news we finished the year with a huge deficit. “Where’s the leadership around here? How can they be asking me to give more? Don’t they realize times are tough? They should be doing everything possible to meet my needs, not asking me for help.” Takers just don’t get it. They really do think it’s all about them. They really do believe it’s everyone else’s responsibility but theirs to give, to pray, to serve, and to share their faith. The thieves in Jesus’ story represent those who approach both living and giving with a taker mentality. “What belongs to you is mine and I’m going to take it.” The next approach is represented by the priest and the Levite. Who are they?

THE KEEPERS.

What’s their approach to living and giving? “What is mine belongs to me and I will keep it.” That’s how the priest and the Levite responded to the severely injured man. Can you imagine what they might have said to themselves when they saw this bleeding, beat up man lying there on the side of the highway? “If I help that man, I’ll become ceremonially unclean. I won’t be able to serve in the Temple.... It could be a trick. He might be faking it all just to rob me.... My clothes will get all bloody and messed up.... If I help him, it’s going to cost me both time and money.” Keepers are all about playing it safe in life, protecting themselves at all costs, and never extending themselves if possible. Folk with a keeper mentality love that old says, “Get all you can, can all you get, and then sit on the can!” Keepers’ measure success by how much you can get a hold of and then hold onto in life. Keepers worship security above all – personal security, emotional security, and financial security. They’ve never met a form of security they didn’t like. Life is all about finding and keeping as much security as you can. God and other people produce anxiety in keepers because God and people are always wanting what keepers want to keep! At least, that’s how life looks to a keeper.

All this talk about giving time, talent, and tithe to the Lord makes keepers feel very threatened. Keepers believe time is precious; therefore, it must be kept safe from those who will take it away from them – even the Lord and His work. Keepers believe their time and energy belong to them. They think the Lord gave them the gift of time and energy to pursue meeting their own needs, certainly not for doing God’s will. Keepers know they have abilities, but their focus is building up their personal kingdom, not building up God’s kingdom. And the tithe? As the primary symbol of security in our world, money is to be hoarded so as to increase the feeling of security for the keeper. Now, don’t get me wrong, the keeper is capable of giving something to the Lord’s work and often does so. But anything remotely touching the level of sacrifice or generosity is a deeply offensive request of a keeper. And real generosity begins with the tithe.

Keepers love offering excuses for not giving the tithe. There’s the tried and true, “I don’t know the future, so I need to hold on to my money now” excuse. Ironically, keepers can fully justify 30-year mortgages and multiyear car lease payments when they don’t know what the future holds, but they can’t return to the Lord 10% of what He’s already provided to them in the present! There’s the “tithing is just an Old Testament law that doesn’t apply to me today and I don’t want to be legalistic” excuse. Keepers avoid

answering this question. If God asked 10% of His people back in the Old Testament – and there’s actually good reason to believe it was actually more in the 20-25% range – why should His people today who have experienced far more of His blessing and grace be expected to give less?

I love the story of the guy who made a new commitment to start giving God 10% of his income – the tithe. At first, it wasn’t a major problem, but then he started making some serious money. He began to think that he just couldn’t afford to be giving away that kind of money every paycheck even if it was for the Lord and His work. He told his friend about his concern and his friend said, “Why don’t we kneel down right now and ask God to shrink your income, so you can afford to give just a few dollars again?” Watch out, brothers and sisters! It’s easier than you think to become a keeper!

I mentioned earlier our giving report for our last fiscal year. Here’s how a keeper reacts. “Not bad. I can put off becoming a tither for yet another year. The church is doing fine without any need to raise my own giving. And I’m sure there’s much more qualified and gifted people than me to do all the ministry stuff around this place. Not only am I unbelievably humble to acknowledge that fact, but I’m so busy, busy, busy, too!” Now, if I had given a really bad report, keepers would respond with a keeper mentality. “Someone ought to help this church become fiscally responsible. Economize! Staff and programs need to be cut out if necessary. It’s too bad, but that’s just the way it is.” Keepers just don’t get it any better than takers. Different approach, yes, but the same result. What result am I talking about?

Let me explain it like this. I don’t follow car racing, but a few years ago I understand there was a rather disappointing Indianapolis 500 car race. This is supposed to be one of the most exciting, entertaining car races in the world! Unfortunately, 200 of the 500 miles had to be run under 13 different yellow caution flags. There was an accident that spilled oil all over the track. Then, a spectator dropped his pop drink can onto the track accidentally. Then, one of the drivers hit a rabbit – of all things – that had somehow wandered out onto the track. It was just one thing after another all day long! So, instead of these incredible race cars costing hundreds of thousands of dollars being able to perform at speeds of upwards of 200 miles an hour, for 81 laps – or 200 miles – drivers were forced to follow the pace car at a measly 80 miles per hour.

It doesn’t take much to slow the ministry of this church or any church to a crawl... for the life of a church to be less than God intends... for our witness in the community to struggle rather than prosper... to become just status quo rather than spiritually aggressive when it comes to ministry. It can happen when we make excuses not to tithe. It can happen when we serve only when it’s convenient to do so. It can happen when we use the pandemic as an excuse to sit on the sidelines. It can happen when we get so busy doing good things, we no longer have time to do the best things.

Brothers and sisters, it doesn’t take many pop cans or furry rabbits to weaken the ministry of KRBC. It doesn’t take many yellow caution flags to stunt our efforts for the

Lord Jesus Christ. May God help us! Enough of ministry under a yellow flag! Enough of petty, insignificant excuses not to give generously, not to serve faithfully, and not to share fully when it comes to our time, talent, and tithe. Let the green flag drop again and let it be full speed ahead into the rest of this year and on into 2022 as we share the adventure of helping bring people to Jesus and helping all of us become His better and more devoted disciples. Yes, you're going to get a new pastor sometime next year. That will be a big change for you... and for me! But I believe – and I pray – that KRBC's best ministry years are still ahead of us and not behind us. They will be if we all reject the mentality of the takers (What belongs to you is mine and I will take it) and the keepers (What is mine belongs to me and I will keep it.). Thank God that Jesus' story provides the example of the Samaritan. Which group did he represent?

THE GIVERS.

What was his approach to living and giving? “What is mine belongs to God and I will give it.” At some level, the Samaritan recognized whatever God had given to him was for a larger purpose that just meeting his own needs. When he saw this man dying there on the Jericho road, he realized God had given him the privilege and opportunity to give, and so he gave. Givers approach all of life with a crystal-clear understanding. Givers know everything they have is given to them by God – time, talent, and treasure. Givers know God ultimately owns everything anyway, so what we give in terms of time, talent, and treasure already belongs to Him. Givers give out of gratitude for all God has given to them. Givers never wait for conditions to be perfect before they give, because they know perfect conditions this side of Heaven are an illusion. Givers refuse to wait until there're more time, more money, better health, a better job, or a bigger house, or even when the pandemic is officially declared to be over – to give of themselves. Instead of protecting themselves – a priority for keepers – givers release themselves to God and then to others in His Name. Givers just can't hoard time, talent, of financial treasure. Instead, they invest that stuff.

Givers aren't people who spend all day every day at the church building! No, givers just commit a generous slice of their time to God and His work. They worship regularly, they're intentionally plugged into some kind of class, small group, or triad for the purpose of becoming a better disciple, they're serving the Lord some place in the church, they're given to prayer, and they have a heart of love for specific spiritually lost people. Givers want God to use them! Givers discern between spending their time and giving lots of energy to the best things rather than just to good things, Givers never try to do everything. Instead, they give of themselves in the areas God has gifted and equipped them to serve. It's not about being self-motivated, but instead being Holy Spirit-motivated. The Holy Spirit is the One who is continually urging them to be available to God every day.

I mentioned earlier our giving from our last fiscal year. How do givers react? “Great! Praise the Lord for letting me be a part of sustaining the ministry of KRBC and in the midst of a very difficult year for all of us. Now, it's full speed ahead! Lord, what more

can I do? What needs can I meet? How can I better contribute?" Givers know that whatever financial resources they possess are the result of God's blessings not so much their wisdom or intelligence. Givers use money; money doesn't use them. Givers sign up for something like Financial Peace University which our church will offer again down the road. Why? Because givers want to live and give generously. Givers invariably tithe and often give beyond the tithe. Over time, they come to see it - less and less - as some great sacrifice and - more and more - as an expression of continual gratitude to God for all He's done for them. Givers may start out tithing from a simple desire to obey the Lord, but they continue tithing because of the joy they experience. Givers get it. Givers understand who God is and what He's doing. Givers want to be a part of helping to build God's Kingdom and seeing lives transformed by the power and love of the Lord Jesus Christ.

What about God? Is He a taker, a keeper, or a giver? "For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son.... Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else?" (Jo. 3:16; Rom. 8:32 NLT) God is the ultimate Giver, isn't He? There are three approaches to both living and giving. You can be a taker, a keeper, or a giver. May God help each of us become and stay givers! "What is mine belongs to God and I will give it."

A couple of weeks ago I told a story about how in some African worship services, believers like to do a little dance as they come forward to present their financial gifts to the Lord. An English missionary to Africa told about another unusual offering received at a service one Sunday. It was a bright, beautiful, sunny Sunday morning. This missionary had just shared a message on the transfiguration of Jesus. In his message, he encouraged the congregation to reflect the glory of God in everything they did just as Jesus did in His life and ministry. After the message was over, they took up the offering. In the service that day was a young woman who had just recently been baptized. She literally did not have even one penny to put in the offering plate. But when the plate came down the row to her, she quietly rose from her seat, placed the plate on the floor and stood on it. It was a symbolic, but powerful act of commitment. She was giving the gift of herself.

Can you picture that scene? I got some pictures of staff members standing on an offering plate just to give us a visual. You get extra points if you can match the staff member and their feet! That's really what this message series has really been all about. When you give time, talent, and tithe to the Lord, it's all about giving of yourself in gratitude to an incredibly generous God. My hope and prayer is that each of us discover to a greater degree why being generous is a mark of genius. "If you want to be smart, spend carefully. If you want to be wise, save regularly. If you want to be a genius, give generously."