

***Shiloh United Methodist Church***

**The Secret To True Wealth**

Genesis 12:1-2; Rev. Tyler Amundson January 20, 2019  
Ecclesiastes 5:10; Proverb 22:7; Luke 12:15; 1 Timothy 6:18-19

Spoken Word – Beginning of Service

Today we continue our worship series on “Finding Joy in Real Life.” We are continuing our look at 5 biblically based principals of living, habits that can help us to live our lives abundantly as Jesus calls us to be people of faith. I hope by now each of us has learned a little something new about our walk with Jesus, I know as a Pastor I have learned some new things in my own study of these principals.

Our lesson today is on generosity and true wealth.

Today as we enter into worship I invite you to think about the things in your life that cause you to be less than generous. Are they physical items you hold on to that cause you to feel greed? Are they resources, like finances, that make you feel superior or hold you back from relationships? Is it how tightly you guard your time for certain things that don't actually bring your life? Today as we begin our worship as let's let go of those things and celebrate that we are here at Shiloh with one another, to learn to be generous with our lives, like God is with us.

Message –

**Genesis 12:1-2 Common English Bible (CEB)**

**12 The Lord said to Abram, “Leave your land, your family, and your father’s household for the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup> I will make of you a great nation and will bless you. I will make your name respected, and you will be a blessing.**

**Ecclesiastes 5:10 Common English Bible (CEB)**

**<sup>10</sup> The money lover isn’t satisfied with money; neither is the lover of wealth satisfied with income. This too is pointless.**

**Proverbs 22:7 Common English Bible (CEB)**

**<sup>7</sup> The wealthy rule over the poor;  
a borrower is a slave to a lender.**

**Luke 12:15 Common English Bible (CEB)**

**<sup>15</sup> Then Jesus said to them, “Watch out! Guard yourself against all kinds of greed. After all, one’s life isn’t determined by one’s possessions, even when someone is very wealthy.”**

**1 Timothy 6:18-19 Common English Bible (CEB)**

**<sup>18</sup> Tell them to do good, to be rich in the good things they do, to be generous, and to share with others. <sup>19</sup> When they do these things, they will save a treasure for themselves that is a good foundation for the future. That way they can take hold of what is truly life.**

Today we are on the 4<sup>th</sup> of 5 Sundays exploring living out Joy in our real lives. In this series we are studying 5 biblically based principals that help us to live in God’s call on our lives. And today is one we need to hear often, especially in our culture that tries to sell us happiness. It is that God’s path to joy for us is about being generous, that for us to be happy we have to be willing to share our wealth. I love doing generosity sermons when we are not in a stewardship season, because I don't have to ask you for anything at the end. Instead today I get to

remind us how our God calls us to be generous and how it makes a difference in our lives and in our church.

Today as we talk about generosity I want to invite us to consider three types of generosity: Generosity of Spirit, Generosity of Finances, and Generosity of Time

All three take a sacrifice and our energy, time and finances are the most well-guarded resources in our culture.

Throughout the bible there are reminders of our call to generosity the first comes from Abraham's story and for us a Christians it is a reminder that from the beginning of time the children of God, which Jesus says is all of us, have been promised by their God to not worry for God will provide for them. I share this because generosity can be hard, because there is some sense that there will not be enough resources, enough to get by. It seems for us generosity is a challenge of how much can we give up before it is too much.

This week Crystal and her friend were talking about Jesus as their pace car. If you don't know what a pace car is, in NASCAR and Indy racing it is a consumer model car that pulls out on the track when there is an obstruction and sets the pace, so cars can get safely around the track. During that time no cars can pass each other and no one passes the pace car. Crystal and her friend were talking about Jesus being the pace car of the slow pickup on Broadwater Avenue who gives them permission not to drive at the sometimes crazy speeds that Billings drivers engage in during the first major snowfall. This is what a pace

car looks like,



though I think Jesus as a Pace car looks more like this.



The reason I took off on this Pace car tangent is that I believe Jesus is a great measure of our generosity Pace. In the gospels Jesus asks people

to be as generous as they need to be to remove all obstacles between them and God. For the Rich Man it is all his belongings, which he struggles to do. For the busy person, it is to give up busyness, and for the ones wonder if they will have enough it just enough to know they can make it on what God provides. And often after Jesus paces us he invites us to go ahead with him and God at our side. This is why he shares the passage we have from Luke 12 today.

### **Luke 12:15 Common English Bible (CEB)**

**<sup>15</sup> Then Jesus said to them, “Watch out! Guard yourself against all kinds of greed. After all, one’s life isn’t determined by one’s possessions, even when someone is very wealthy.”**

In our culture the formula for wealth looks something like this:

$$\text{Wealth} = \text{Money} = \text{Happiness}^1$$

Advertisers use this to sell to us, and in some sense we teach this to our children. A great study by Daniel Kahneman and Angus Deaton out of Princeton University actually backs this idea up a little bit.<sup>2</sup> They studied 450,000 people to analyze wealth, well-being and stress in people’s lives. They found that people who made about \$75,000 a year had lower stress on their relationships, and yet people who made more than that were no happier as their income bracket went higher. So, it is clear from the study that some wealth is part of life more free of stress because you have resources, but too much can place our values on the wrong things.

CS Lewis wrote a children’s novel, many of you know it, it is called *The Lion The Witch and The Wardrobe*. One of the key notions in the fictitious world of Narnia that Lewis creates is that there is an evil white

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<sup>1</sup> <https://vimeo.com/259761475> - Much of the resources for this sermon come from Adam Hamilton and this sermon series is by his church. Thanks for the resources and ability to have some deeper research in sermons during this busy season.

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.princeton.edu/sites/default/files/content/docs/news/Happiness\\_Money\\_Summary.pdf](http://www.princeton.edu/sites/default/files/content/docs/news/Happiness_Money_Summary.pdf)

witch who has made it always winter in Narnia, “Always winter and never Christmas.” I love the image of coldness and never feeling like we are going to escape because it describes so many of the trappings of life. Especially the challenge of finances, we depend on two things in life, “death and ..... taxes.” Lewis’ image of it always winter and never Christmas feels like the same trap. Yet, when the book turns toward the new time that the Christ figure, Aslan, is bringing something happens as Christmas arrives and winter moves along. The animals all begin to hear something, none of them can figure out what the noise is. I love it, because it is like we are when we are so used to the way something should work and when things start to shift we all look around surprised when seasons begin to change. The noise the animals can’t identify is the melting, we heard it yesterday in Billings. When the ice starts to melt, and things change the very feeling and senses we experience can at first put us on edge and then bring the new season of our lives.

That same study that identifies that it is good to have a certain level of income to be more stress free, also points out that emotional well-being is not entirely dependent on level of wealth. In fact college graduates are shown to be less emotionally healthy. Instead the research identifies that close relationships and even religion in people’s lives tends to make for better emotional health. That’s a selling point for church if I have ever heard one. The truth is this report melts the ice a bit on the idea that only wealth and the perfect life financially will bring us happiness.

Our scripture from Ecclesiastes is helpful to remind us that Solomon, who is attributed to Ecclesiastes wrote it after gaining wealth beyond knowing. In the Ecclesiastes you will find that as he came to the end of his life he realized wealth was not bringing joy, but instead recognizing life’s purpose and the cycles of God in that life.

## **Ecclesiastes 5:10 Common English Bible (CEB)**

**<sup>10</sup>The money lover isn't satisfied with money; neither is the lover of wealth satisfied with income. This too is pointless.**

There was a man in the middle of the 1800s in England who was fed up with the way poor were being treated. His father had gone into debtors prison when he was young, so he had had to work in a factory when he was 12 along with much younger children. He began to author a pamphlet he hoped would sway the tide of greed in England during that time. He hoped to outline how children were being treated, how debtors prisons harm families, and how England after 100 years of trying still needed a better way. In 1842 he published something, it was not a pamphlet, instead it wound up turning into a novel. One you have probably read, it is called *A Christmas Carol*. Charles Dickens was the young man who wrote it and in it is a character we all know, Scrooge. Whose name is now synonymous with greed.

Dicken's tale of scrooge involves 3 ghosts who remind him that his greed is not worth losing relationships, sharing his time with others and who will really care about his wealth when he is dead. The reminder found also in our passage from **1 Timothy 6:18-19 Common English Bible (CEB)**

**<sup>18</sup>Tell them to do good, to be rich in the good things they do, to be generous, and to share with others. <sup>19</sup>When they do these things, they will save a treasure for themselves that is a good foundation for the future. That way they can take hold of what is truly life.**

In the modern day a group of sociologist did some research on we who hold onto wealth of all kinds and found they have habits that make them emotionally unhealthy here is what they share:

“By grasping onto what we currently have,” Smith writes, “we lose out on better goods that we might have gained. In holding onto what we

possess, we diminish its long-term value to us. By always protecting ourselves against future uncertainties and misfortunes, we are affected in ways that make us more anxious about uncertainties and vulnerable to future misfortunes. In short, by failing to care for others, we do not properly take care of ourselves. It is no coincidence that the word 'miser' is etymologically related to the word 'miserable.'"<sup>3</sup>

Have you heard the story about the man who gave his regular tithe in church. However, when he got big raise at work he went the Pastor and said, "Now that I am making \$300,000 instead of \$150,000 I can afford the extra tithe." The pastor said, "Well that is a problem, can I pray for you?" The man agreed and the Pastor and him sat down to pray, "God please help this man make less money."

As Methodists whose very church came up from the time of greed in England, when people needed to know God called them to be generous, and as people of Shiloh I regularly consider and pray that we might be a congregation of philanthropists. I hope we are finding ways to be generous, opening ourselves to where God might be calling us to give of ourselves to transform the world in God's will.

I hope we consider rounding up to the next dollar when we give tips, because honestly is that small amount going to hurt us giving it away, I hope we are seeking ways to offer support where it is needed, shoveling our neighbors walkway when our driveway isn't yet finished.

As Christians I hope we are working hard to offer to others our Spirit, our time and our resources for the glory of God.

As we celebrate our history this Sunday, as we recognize Shiloh has been here for 33 years and as we remember ourselves as the "copper

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<sup>3</sup> <https://news.nd.edu/news/notre-dame-sociologists-explore-the-paradox-of-generosity/>

top church,” “the good bones church” and the “church without walls.” I invite you to remember how we are called to be generous together with time, energy, and resources.

Last summer I got an opportunity to learn about this plaque on the wall. This is for Rosie Massey. Rosie was a part of our congregation for her whole life. Rosie had some challenges from birth that made it hard for her to learn. At one point we were not sure we could even offer Sunday school to her, so her special ed teacher invited her to her church. That did not work either, it wasn't home for her. So, our congregation banded together to offer individual classes, we volunteered to make sure she was loved, so she could be with other children and sing Father Abraham her favorite song, one she sang when she would go to sleep at night. We in our history have worked hard to share and be generous with all we encounter.

As I heard this story it was very much like a ministry at another church I know of called Matthews ministry. A ministry started for a child just like Rosie that ended up meeting the needs of so many other children. I invite us to hear from Matthew's parents, the boy who inspired the ministry when they came to a small little church and said to the pastor, “We want to be here, but our son just won't have the resources.” The pastor went back to his church and said, “I told them you were generous, now let's make this happen.

<https://vimeo.com/259761298>

So how are we being called to be generous, to transform the world. I invite us to remember Ecclesiastes, Solomon had all the riches in the world and recognized that God's purpose is what gives us life. It is why so many people die within a short time of retirement, we are called to have purpose and our purpose is to be generous with one another.

As I close this week I am going to again pray for us to have guidance as we go to practice generosity this week, as we have done with the other practices. And this week on your playing card you will see that we are invited to find someone to bless this week, I encourage you to try and do it this week. Then come and tell a friend about it in church next week, not to brag, but so we can hear from each other what God is doing in our lives.

Would you pray with me?

God help us to be generous, to trust you call us beyond ourselves to share with our community. God be our pace car, help us to share what will get us closer to you and to Jesus' ways in our lives. Generosity can feel hard God, and it can be hard to trust, but you call to us. Help us give of ourselves and feel the deep joy that comes from connecting to your call to serve in our community. Give us purpose, holy God, Amen.