



*Week 1*

# **We Are Most Like God When We Give**

**Luke 6:27-36**

## *Sermon Outline*

### **We Are Most Like God When We Give**

#### **Luke 6:27-36**

- I. ILL – Andy Stanley – system of judging who gets help and who doesn't.
  - A. We all have some system of deciding who receives our generosity
    - 1. ILL – Christmas gifts
  - B. Want to talk today about something that is awkward for preachers – money –
    - 1. But, here's the deal: I don't want anything from you. I'm not asking...
    - 2. Just honor of pointing you toward God's heart about gifts.
- II. Luke 6
  - A. One of those passages that we've heard so many times that we forget the shock value
- III. Luke 6:27-36
  - A. "pray for those..." If honest, don't always do good praying for those I love (Jesus knows that)
  - B. "Cloak...tunic" Would have been all the clothes on their bodies
  - C. "Takes what belongs to you..." Radical teaching – wouldn't we sue over this?
  - D. "Do not expect repayment" Often complete acts of generosity expecting some sort of life change
  - E. **We are most like God when we give**
    - 1. God does not give based on the worthiness of the recipient. God is generous based on the goodness of His character.
    - 2. That's just the way God is – radically generous – all the time
- IV. ILL – Rich Young Man – trying to teach him what it means to be like God
  - A. Side note – no one thinks of themselves as rich
    - 1. \$40,000/yr top 4% of the world; \$50,000/yr – top 1% of the world
    - 2. God has given us incredible opportunities to be like Him
  - B. For God so loved the world that He gave – that's the gospel
  - C. ***Here's the thing – God's gifts are not based on your worthiness. Aren't you thankful for that? And as we give freely – out of grace – we become known as children (little carbon copies) of the Most High.***
    - 1. "If you want to be like me, you go and do the same." (Not expecting repayment.)
    - 2. We are most like God when we give
- V. ILL – Pharisees loved money (Luke 16:14)
  - A. Some people are known for being lovers of money (not bad people, not evil, may even be giving at times)
  - B. Some people are known for being incredibly generous.
  - C. Leave you with this question: If God is open-handedly generous toward you, how do you want to treat others?

## *Sermon Manuscript*

Let me ask you a question. How do you determine whether or not you are going to give a gift?

That may sound like a strange question, but we all have some sort of mental system in place that we use to determine if we are going to give or if we are going to ignore the “call to give.” In our minds, we have established certain, unwritten levels of generosity. So, we pretty much know what we are going to do when we get into giving situations.

Let me give you some examples.

The bottom tier of my giving pyramid is comprised of homeless people and those who are asking for handouts. So, if I am walking around downtown and run into someone begging for money, I know fairly quickly whether or not I am going to give to them.

Let me give you an actual scenario. There is a homeless man in downtown Jackson who is probably sixty years old. His exposure to the elements has aged him beyond his years. Every time I see him, he is leaning on his cane and donning a big, silly grin on his face. To every person that passes, he calls out, “Hey, give me a dollar. Give me a dollar.” I honestly think that he needs to word on his “sales pitch.” “Gimme a dolla” is not getting it for me. And even though his smile is nice, I don’t really trust this guy. In fact, one day I was walking into the bank to deposit my check and I saw that same homeless man inside the bank depositing his own check. Now, I understand that he probably gets some assistance from the government and needs a checking account in order to receive the money...but just seeing this guy making a deposit into his account two minutes after seeing him begging for money makes me suspicious. I wonder if I should be the one asking him for a dollar! Therefore, since I don’t know him and since I am suspicious of his activities, he falls to the bottom tier of my giving chart. So, he may get a cup of coffee if I am in a good mood, but I’m probably not going to hand this guy any cash.

The next level of giving, in my life, is reserved for reciprocating generosity. When an acquaintance gives me a small Christmas gift, I may know them well enough to trust them, but I really do not consider them a gift-giving type friend. So, I reciprocate. I do what any good acquaintance would do. I stop by the Dollar Store and pick out something that looks like it costs much more than a dollar. But, I spend just enough to get by because these acquaintances don’t climb very high on my giving chart. I want to maintain a relationship with them. I want to let them know that I care. But, I am not going to spend big bucks on someone that I just pass on the street occasionally.

From there, the levels of giving increase. Legitimate friends get nice gifts. I am not going to shop at the Dollar Store for the people that I know well and want to impress. I am not going to regift something I received last Christmas to the people that I consider true friends. Most of them would not regift items to me and if I am going to buy a gift for a friend, I genuinely want the gift to be helpful. I want it to put a smile on their faces.

Then, moving up the giving chart even further, my best friends, and sisters get better gifts. They are going to get something that is personal. I know them well. I know their needs and wants. And with this group of people, I'm willing to spend a little more money than I spent on the "friends" group. So, because they have reached a certain relationship status in my life, they have moved up the giving chart. They will get something nice.

Finally, my parents and children get gifts that approach extravagance (for my budget). They are going to get something significant. They may even wind up with a gift that cost a little more than the allotted budget. Because of their place in my life, they are going to get a really nice gift.

Finally, my wife is going to get the best that I have to offer. She is the top of the pyramid. She gets the best of the best, because in my mind, she is the best of the best! (How do you like that for sucking up?) But, seriously, in my mind, she is the most important person in my life. She's not trumped by the kids. She's not trumped by my parents. She is at the top. The only relational position higher than her is my relationship with God. So, when it comes to gift giving, she is going to get my very best. While the rest of the family may get toys or clothes, she may receive clothes AND a long weekend type trip.

And before I ever consider giving, I have this tier system in mind. I have a giving plan that is determined before I ever decide to give. And if I were a betting man, I would guess that I am not alone. Chances are pretty high that you have some system of generosity that is outlined in your brain. You have a giving chart that determines how you will respond to people who either need or deserve gifts. We all do this.

And so, over the next few weeks, I want to destroy your giving system. Over the next few weeks, I want to take your mindset on generosity and completely turn it upside down. And I hope that four weeks from now, when you think of giving and generosity, you will have a completely new mindset. I want to set you free from your giving chart and open a door in your life to a new way of experiencing joy. I want to open a door in your life to experience an entirely new perspective on your money and your time and your abilities. I hope that four weeks from now you will have torn up your mental giving chart and...here's the most important part...four weeks from now I hope that you will be utilizing your resources to relate to God in a much more intimate way.

Now, before I go too far, I can already see on some of your faces starting to glaze over. You are already thinking, "Great. He is going to spend the next four weeks talking to us about money and giving."

Can I be completely transparent with you for a minute? This can be an incredibly awkward subject for pastors to talk about. As soon as pastors mention money and giving, the tendency is for us to start thinking about televangelists and guys who are pleading for "more money for the church." And I can say that with complete empathy, because I do the same thing. When I see someone standing on a platform and they start talking about money, I typically want to change the channel or walk out of the room. I don't like it.

But, here's the deal. Please hear me on this. I don't want anything from you. I'm not asking for a larger contribution to the general fund of the church. I'm not proposing a building plan or spending increase. As we go through this series, I am not setting you up for anything. I don't want anything from you. And might be just as important for you to hear that God doesn't want your money. God doesn't need anything that you have. He already owns it all anyway. If He wants it, He can take it or He can develop more material resources to carry out His plans. He's not limited by our stuff.

So, this is not about what I want FROM you. This is not about what God wants FROM you. Instead, this is about what God wants FOR you. As we talk about how God utilizes generosity, I want you to see that God wants to use your stuff...your material possessions, your time and your abilities...to do some amazing things in your life. I want you to see that if we are truly following the ways of Jesus, our giving charts will get thrown out the window and replaced with something much, much better. I want you to see that God wants to utilize our money and resources to deepen our relationship with Him.

So, to start this conversation, I want to look at a passage in the book of Luke. We are going to hang out for a few minutes today in Luke chapter 6. And to be honest with you, the passage that we are going to look at is one that we have heard so much that we often check out mentally when we start hearing these words. Whether you have been in a church community for your entire life or whether this is your first time to sit through a worship service, you have probably heard some of these words. The verses that we are going to read are used in both Christian circles and non-Christian circles to demonstrate the ways of Jesus. So, if an atheist were to write a news article about Jesus, these are some of the words that they would probably use to characterize Him.

Regardless of your faith background, you have probably heard some of these words and you have heard that they were attributed to Jesus.

They are Jesus-isms. They are the phrases that often serve as defining markers for who Jesus is. And since we have heard these phrases connected to Jesus for so long, we almost tend to overlook them. We think...yeah, yeah...that's something Jesus said, but because of our familiarity with these verses, they typically have very little impact on our thinking.

So, today, I want to slow down and look at what Jesus was really implying with these "Jesus-isms."

Luke chapter 6, starting in verse 27. Just keep your Bibles open, because we will talk through this as we go. It says;

"But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also." Okay. I told you. These are words that you know. You may have zoned out already because they are so familiar. *Love your enemies...do good...pray for people...turn the other cheek.*

We've heard those things so much that they almost have no meaning for us. Jesus says, "Love your enemies." But, for most of us in here, we tune that out because we think, "I don't have any enemies. I can just avoid the people that I don't really like. But, I don't have enemies." Or, we may think, "I know that Jesus was telling us how to be perfect, but is this really necessary? Do I have to love the people that are out to cause me harm? Do I really have to care for those that hate me? Maybe it would just be better for me to keep my distance from them. Maybe it would just be better to ignore them and pray that they would leave me alone."

But, Jesus is calling us to a radical way of life with these words. Jesus is saying, "If someone hates you – with or without cause – I want you to proactively engage them with love. I want you to proactively care for them. Love them."

And if we want to truly follow the ways of Jesus, we can't just write this off as a nice sounding Jesus saying. We can't write this off as a Jesus-ism that doesn't really apply to our lives. If we really want to follow Jesus, it means that we take this stuff seriously.

He goes on and says, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also." So, let's look at our lives and see if those things really apply to us. Are we doing good to those who hate us? Are you praying for those who mistreat you?

Let's be honest. I think most of us in here would admit that there are times where we forget to pray for our family and friends. There are times where a friend will come to us and say, "I'm hurting in this area. Would you pray for me when you have a chance?" And, of course, we always say, "Sure. I would love to join with you in praying about that." And then we walk away and forget about their request all together.

We aren't always great about praying for those that we love. So, what does that say about praying for those that are mistreating us? And maybe even more difficult than that, let me ask you...are you praying for those that are mistreating others that you love? Are you praying for the bully in school that has been picking on your son? Are you praying for the guy in the office who is loud and arrogant and will walk over anyone to get his way?

When we are honest about this stuff, we often realize that these words are so familiar to us that they hold no meaning anymore. They are just the nice things that a man like Jesus would say. But, they don't hold any real value in our lives. We don't take Him seriously on these points anymore.

Let's keep reading. Verse 29 says, "If someone slaps on the cheek, turn the other to them also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them."

In other words, Jesus said, "If someone takes the shirt off of your back, give them your undershirt as well."



“Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

Did that sink in? Did you hear what He just said? Jesus says, “Give to *everyone* who asks of you.” That completely messes up our giving charts. If we take that one phrase seriously, it completely destroys our old mindsets about giving. And then...He goes on to say...”If someone steals from you, don’t hunt them down. Don’t demand that they give it back. Just consider it an act of generosity.”

Wow! I don’t know about you, but this is radical stuff to me. This does not line up with the way that I think or the way that I do life. This is so far from the ordinary for me. Give to everybody? Don’t demand that thieves give your stuff back? That’s crazy!

Now, listen. Jesus is about to explain the “why” in all of this. He is about to tell us why He wants us to think and live this way. In verse 32, He says;

“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”

Jesus says two things here that I want us to see. First of all, He says that the way that we think about and handle our material possessions will separate us from the rest of the world. People will know that we are following Jesus by the way that we live...if we truly live out these teachings.

But, second, and potentially more important, Jesus says that when we do these things...when we love our enemies and treat them well...when we live with open hands of generosity...we will be known as “children of the Most High, because He is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.”

In other words, once we start to live our lives on the platform of radical generosity, we are starting to imitate the ways of God. When generosity defines our lifestyles, Jesus says that it is at that point that we become known as “little Christs.” It is in that context that we become known as Christians.

Here’s the thing. Write this down...highlight it in your brain...whatever you have to do. But, get this. We are most like God when we give. We are most like God when we give.

And notice what Jesus said at the end of verse 35. He said, “He” meaning God, “is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.” I don’t know about you, but I am incredibly thankful for that. God does not treat us the way we deserve to be treated. He is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. God does not give based on the worthiness of the recipient. He doesn’t have a giving chart that we can

climb. And if we are going to follow His ways, we shouldn't have a giving chart either. God says, "Don't give because they deserve it. Give because you are following my ways."

God is not generous based on the worthiness of the recipient; He's generous based on the goodness of His character. And if we are ever going to get this right...if we are ever going to be good imitators of Jesus, we have to give out of a desire to imitate God's character and not out of a desire to reward the recipient for their worthiness.

That's simply the way of God. He is radically generous all the time. And we are most like God when we give.

Do you remember the story of the Rich Young Ruler? You can read it later in Luke 18, but let me just remind you of this story.

There was a young guy who probably held some position of prominence in his village. At one point, he runs up to Jesus and asks, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Now, just to give you a quick reminder here, there was really very little distinction in the Jewish world between heaven and life on earth. To the Jews, the kingdom of heaven didn't begin when you died. It began when you truly experienced a relationship with God. It began on earth and continued through eternity.

Therefore, when this young man asks Jesus, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" he's probably not asking to be saved. He is probably asking Jesus, "What can I do to start experiencing heaven here on earth?"

Jesus responds by reminding this young ruler of the commandments and the guy says that he has kept them all. So, Jesus says to him, "Well, there's still one thing that is keeping you from experiencing heaven here on earth. Go sell all that you have, give to the poor and then follow me."

You remember the story. The rich young man went away sad. He walked away with his head down because he loved his stuff. He loved his money. And as a result, he completely missed out on the gift that Jesus was trying to give him. His money and possessions kept him from imitating God...and it kept him from truly experiencing the joys of heaven on earth.

Just a quick side note here. It can be easy for us to rationalize this story. It can be easy for us to say, "Well, that young guy was missing God because of he was worshiping his great wealth." And there's some truth to that. But, it's also true that you and I are wealthy.

No one ever likes to think of themselves as rich. We can always look up the socio-economic ladder and see people above us. We can always rationalize that "I'm barely able to pay my bills and I'm certainly no millionaire." We don't think of ourselves as rich.





But, when we look at the rest of the world, we are all wealthy. If you have twenty dollars to your name...if you plan to go out to eat today...if you make more than \$2 an hour, you are wealthy compared to the majority of the world.

If your family income is \$40,000 a year, you are in the wealthiest 4% of the world. And if your family income is \$50,000 a year or more, you rank in the top 1% of the wealthiest people in the world.

Do you know that there are families in other parts of the world that are literally working as slaves – the entire family – over a six hundred dollar debt? I recently saw an incredibly sobering film called “Live 58” (which is a call to live out the true fast of Isaiah 58) and they showed a family in India that works in a rock quarry. The parents and young children all work in this quarry hammering and breaking apart rocks every day. The father of the family was interviewed and he expressed incredible sadness over the fact that his children could not go to school like the other kids. They had to work as slaves. And the father mentioned that the debt would not be paid off during his lifetime or the lifetime of his children. They would be hard labor slaves for life. All over a \$600 debt that the father owed.

Here’s the reason I tell you that. We are wealthy. We are blessed. And God has given every one of us an incredible opportunity to imitate His generous ways. We have so much. We have been entrusted with so much. And God implores us...”Use your wealth to be radically generous. Use your wealth to imitate my ways.”

For God so loved the world that He gave. That’s the gospel. That’s the way of God.

Here’s the thing. God is radically generous and His generosity is not based on the worthiness of the recipient. He gives freely...out of grace. And as we give generously and freely out of grace, we become known as children (little carbon copies) of the Most High.

Throughout the gospel, God shows us His kindness through His generosity. And then He says to us, “If you want to be like me, go and do likewise.”

If we want to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, we will live generous lives that don’t give based on a giving chart and don’t give based on the worthiness of the recipient. If we want to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, we will give generously and never expect repayment.

If we want to follow in the paths of Jesus, we will give generously. Because that was His way. That is God’s way. And we are most like God when we give.

In another passage in Luke (Luke 16), Jesus tells a story about handling money and material possessions. Then, He makes a statement that we are all familiar with. He says, “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

Do you remember that?



Do you know what the very next verse says? Luke 16:14 says, “The Pharisees, *who loved money*, heard all of this and were sneering at him.”

See, the Pharisees assumed that money and wealth were a sign that God favored you. They assumed that large sums of money meant that God was on your side. And then, Jesus compared money to an idol (Mammon). He said it held great power for evil. And His antidote? Live with an open hand. Live a generous life. Because in spite of what the rest of the world says, money is not the source of joy and happiness. Money is not the source of heaven on earth.

Some people – good people, with good intentions – are being destroyed by their love of money. And others are taking the power of money and turning it on its head by living generous lives.

Some people are being identified as great people of this world by their accumulation of money and possessions. And some people are being identified as children of God by their lifestyles of generosity.

Let me leave you with a question. Which of those people are you?

If God is open-handedly gracious and generous toward you, how will you handle the possessions that He’s placed in your care?