

We Are – Radically Generous

1 Timothy 6:6-21

(Expanded Sermon Notes)



Over the course of September, we have been looking at our mission, vision, and values at Christ Community. This isn't an informational series just on who we are, but it dives deeply into the biblical realities and foundation for our mission, vision, and values. One of those values is radical generosity, where we live adventurously to impact our world. One of the things that I love about our church is that this value is lived out in so many ways, and at the same time, there is so much more that the Lord has for us to be about. Let's take a second to celebrate some recent radical generosity.

In July, we hosted Royal Family Kids Camp, where 50 adults invested in 17 campers over the course of a week. That is just over 1,300 hours of radically generous time given so that foster kids from Story County can hear about God's amazing love for them, and foster families get a week of needed respite. On top of that, our church, along with generous financial supporters, covers the cost of everything for the week of camp! This summer we had over people engaged as foster parents or who are stepping into active support roles for foster families. We are also financially partnering with organizations that are helping to bring needed and timely updates and support to the foster care system in our state by working with elected officials and leaders!

When it comes to loving our neighbors and meeting everyday needs, our church continues to be a first-call resource for those facing housing insecurity or utility needs in Ames and Gilbert. Our church is so generous in this area that county planning boards regularly recognize that our financial generosity in this area significantly helps to extend other resources throughout our county. In August, through our Ames housewarming initiative, over \$600 in gift cards and multiple carloads of everyday necessities were donated to help our neighbors. We Heart Ames mobilized 150 volunteers from three churches to serve our city through tangible acts of love and service. The Hope in Christ Back to School event also handed out 900 new pairs of shoes and 1,800 pairs of new socks at the middle school in August. This was also a coordinated effort by multiple local churches, including CCC, for the good of our neighbors.

We also love being radically generous to support the health of local EFCA churches and pastors. This summer alone, we stepped into a funding gap to support the mental and spiritual health of local church pastors who, instead of burning out, now have the resources to lead with health and energy. We committed to being a financial partner in helping resource three local EFCA church plants and signed on as an early

financial supporter of a new five-million-dollar fundraising effort within our movement to strengthen church planting in ways we've never experienced before.

All of this and so much more is possible because of your radical and faithful generosity! God is using this church to make a difference in the lives of those here in our city and region, and to the ends of the earth! The simple truth about our value of radical generosity is that we believe we are called to be radically generous not to earn God's love and favor, but in right response to it. That is, we are radically generous because he was first generous to us. This isn't a new idea; in fact, it is the same truth that Paul exhorts a young pastor named Timothy with.

1. God's good provision.

a. A few quick notes on the letter, its setting, and audience.

- i. First Timothy is one of three pastoral letters (including 2 Timothy and Titus) that the aging apostle Paul sent to those who would continue his work. Timothy was, in every way, Paul's spiritual son. Young but gifted, Timothy had been assigned to lead the church at Ephesus—a church needing order in worship as well as doctrinal correction, plagued as it was by false teachers. Paul's letter, likely written about A.D. 62–66, counseled the young man on matters of church leadership—from proper worship, to qualifications for overseers (elders) and deacons, to advice on confronting false teaching and how to treat various individuals within a congregation. Paul charged Timothy to live a life beyond reproach, giving believers a standard to emulate.¹
- ii. **The Ephesian church is, both geographically and culturally speaking, far away from the settings of the Gospels.** The churches in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) were deeply entrenched in Roman politics, religious worship, and cultural dynamics that were vastly different from their brothers and sisters in the churches around Jerusalem. Ephesus was a harbor city with cultural ideas coming and going with every ship and sailor that came and went. **Ephesus was the most important of the seven cities. Though Pergamum was apparently the official capital of the province of Asia, Ephesus was its greatest city (population 250,000+).** It was a large town and a seat of proconsular government (Acts 19:38). When a proconsul took up his appointment, he had to enter his province at Ephesus.² This prominence and flow of trade contributed to its complexity.
- iii. Beginning in the reign of Caesar Augustus and lasting for 200 years, Ephesus experienced a more stable political history which enabled the city to prosper and thrive.³
 1. **Ephesus may accurately be called the leading city of the richest region of the Roman Empire. Politically, the city functioned as the Roman provincial capital**

¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2025), 1 Ti.

² Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 63.

³ Clinton E. Arnold, "Ephesus," ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 249.

of Asia Minor (from 133 B.C.). Economically, Strabo called Ephesus “the greatest commercial center in Asia this side of the Taurus river.”⁴

- iv. This letter is one of Paul’s three pastoral letters – 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus.
 - 1. All three letters were written to young pastors that he had charged with the care and strengthening of local churches.
 - a. Titus was stationed in Crete.
 - b. Timothy was stationed in Ephesus.
- v. The false teachers in Ephesus. (v.6)
 - 1. The dictum of the false teachers is first of all admitted, yet with an all-important proviso. The notion of self-mastery inherent in the word translated *contentment* (*autarkeia*) is singularly Pauline (the noun occurs elsewhere only in 2 Cor. 9:8 and the adjective in Phil. 4:11). **Godliness will only be true gain when independent of circumstances, and the apostle himself provides an admirable pattern of this in Philippians 4:11.** To the Stoic notion of self-mastery Christianity brings the essential quality of a contented mind.⁵
 - a. Remember, Ephesus was a city obsessed with wealth and pleasure, so it is no wonder that the false teaching revolved around these things.
- b. **The beginning of generosity is not our effort or pity; it is the care of God.**
 - i. Paul roots Timothy in an important theological reality about the nature of God; he is the one who initiates and sustains life itself. Without him, we are literally nothing.
 - 1. V. 7 – “for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world...”
 - 2. V.13 – “I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things...”
 - 3. V. 17 – “...God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.”
- c. **What is contentment? v. 6**
 - i. **Contentment is satisfaction with God’s good provision.**
 - ii. A couple of important things about this definition.
 - 1. First, contentment in the Christian perspective actually has very little to do with the object or item that is provided. The fact that we can be satisfied with something is because of the theological conviction that it has come from God and is an extension of his good care for us.
 - 2. Second, contentment that is not rooted in an object is actually transferable to any and every season of our lives. That is what Paul is setting up when he expresses that godliness with contentment is great gain. It is not our circumstances that drive our contentment, it is the relationship that we have with God. → This is why Paul can so powerfully write, **“Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned, in whatever situation I am, to be content. ¹² I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.”** (Phil. 4:11-12)
 - 3. Third, contentment is not some good vibes and positive attitude reality that can be curated or manifested. The kind of contentment that Paul is speaking of here

⁴ Clinton E. Arnold, “Ephesus,” ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 249.

⁵ Donald Guthrie, *Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 14, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 127.

is the kind that only comes from an abiding relationship with the God of the universe.

iii. A powerfully different reality to contentment.

1. The thrust of what the apostle is saying is that material possessions are equally irrelevant at our entrance into and exit from the world. The second part of the statement points to the controlling factor, for it shows the folly of the constant quest to amass possessions which must be left behind at death. The saying also highlights the transitoriness of human life. **Contentment in the present depends on a belief in a future which is independent of material things. Real living is infinitely more than the gaining of what is merely transitory.**⁶
2. This means that contentment is actually connected not just to my present, but it is directly intertwined with my future. This is a powerful antidote to disappointment. When I keep the end in mind, and the glory that I will experience there, my disappointments in this life become reframed and reordered into a healthy perspective.
 - a. **The fact is, contentment does not come from owning whatever we want, for there is no end to what we want. A Christian approach to life can never make a central feature of the acquisition of material things.**⁷

2. The root of evil.

a. We cannot forget the context of this letter, Ephesus.

- i. The context is so important for us to understand so that we can rightly apply the truths of the passage to our modern lives.
- ii. Paul is not condemning wealth or material possessions. That would be a cheap and wrong application. Nor is he glorifying them.
- iii. Ephesus, as a city, was known for opulence and wealth. These things were seen both as markers of divine blessing and moral good. → i.e., If you had much in this world, it was seen a sign that the gods favored you and that you were a good person.
 1. Paul is refuting both of those ideas.

b. Correction for all of us.

i. The Bible does not teach that material wealth is morally good or bad.

1. Material wealth from an ethical perspective is morally neutral. What we do with it and how we see it is what crosses into the realm of moral goodness or evil.
 - a. You can be wealthy and sin or wealthy and righteous.
 - b. You can be poor and sin or poor and righteous.
 - i. Your monetary wealth is not an indicator of your righteousness, nor is it a driver.

ii. Instead, it challenges us to avoid idolizing or demonizing material wealth.

1. Strong words are used in the description of those whose desires are set upon the acquisition of wealth. The words apply to all whose aims are controlled by the passion to increase material possessions, yet there is here no condemnation of

⁶ Donald Guthrie, *Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 14, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 127.

⁷ Donald Guthrie, *Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 14, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 128.

such possessions in themselves. The apostle is not so much thinking of those already rich, as of those ever grasping to become so. On the two other occasions in the Pastorals where the word *trap* is used, it is described as the devil's, and this is suggested here by its close association with *temptation*. Three clear steps of decline are discernible: first the lure, then the lust, and finally the total moral ruin. **The verb translated *plunge* (*bythizō*) vividly represents the desire for wealth as a personal monster which plunges its victim into an ocean of ruin and destruction. The linking of the two words (*olethros* and *apōleia*) suggests an irretrievable loss.**⁸

2. V. 17 - **The approach to wealth is strikingly moderate. There is no suggestion of denunciation. Rich men must carefully avoid two perils: (a) loftiness of mind, and (b) too much dependence on wealth.** One suggestion is that the parable of the man who built his house on the sand may lie beneath this warning (cf. Scott). In face of the increase in materialism the reminder of the uncertainty of riches is relevant to our modern age. There is the danger of trusting in material security instead of in God, the Giver of all things. These words would incidentally provide an answer to excessive abstinence, for if God has ordained everything for enjoyment (*who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment*) the ascetic approach cannot be right.⁹

c. **Fleeing sin and pursuing righteousness. – Paul's recipe for a godly life.**

- i. If renouncing all material wealth is not the answer, nor is celebrating it. What is the path for a godly life in this arena? → Fleeing and pursuing.
- ii. The antithesis in the words *flee ... pursue* is in the characteristic manner of Paul. It is repeated exactly in 2 Timothy 2:22. Of the objects of pursuit the first two describe a general religious disposition, *righteousness* being used in its widest sense of conformity to what is right towards both God and man, and *godliness* of general piety. This double pursuit is also found in Titus 2:12. The two following virtues, *faith* and *love*, are fundamental to Christianity and cardinal in Paul's teaching. It has been suggested that for Paul faith and love were sufficient to stand alone without needing to be linked with other virtues. But in Galatians 5:22 the same two virtues occur with others in a statement about the fruit of the Spirit. **The concluding virtues, *endurance and gentleness*, link together two very different qualities. The first has an element of strength, a patient stickability. But the second is softer, a gentleness of feeling, which in itself is a somewhat rarer quality. It is a precious target for the man of God.**¹⁰
- iii. There is something powerful in Paul's prescription here. To flee is not enough for righteousness; we also need to pursue what is good and godly.
 1. Too often in modern church circles, we reduce righteousness to the avoidance of what is wrong or prohibited in the Bible. However, that is not sufficient, and Paul's words here make that clear.

⁸ Donald Guthrie, *Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 14, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 128.

⁹ Donald Guthrie, *Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 14, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 132.

¹⁰ Donald Guthrie, *Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 14, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 129.

2. The interesting thing about pursuing righteousness and what is good (steadfastness, love, faith, gentleness) is that in order to do it, we must truly lean into the Lord for his provision and supply. The more that we grow dependent on the Lord for these things, the more it actually grows our generosity.

3. Being radically generous.

- a. **“As for the rich...” Paul’s opening clause in v.17 invites us into something good, beautiful, and just.**
 - i. Paul’s first two uses of the word “rich” were connected to the challenges and shortcomings of the pursuit of wealth. Now, he turns it and connects it to something that is lasting and beautiful, godliness.
 - ii. We are once again reminded that God’s provision and goodness always precede our generosity and righteousness. That is, without God’s intervening and gracious action on our behalf, we wouldn’t be able to respond in any way that would allow us to be “rich” in good works.
- b. **“Laying up treasures in heaven.” → Connection back to what is eternal.**
 - i. How many of us hold to the eternal perspective when we are giving something away? Too often, our perspective is short-sighted and only connected to the here and now. That is not a potshot at well-intentioned giving. It is a recognition that for all of us it is hard to keep eternity in mind. Once again, that is Paul’s driving point: eternity matters, and our generosity is directly connected to what is coming in eternity, not just in this age.
 - ii. Outside of a lasting eternal impact, there is almost no real reason to be generous. It is noble to want to end or ease human suffering and moral evil. But if there is no eternal reality in the future, your generosity is merely an action of easing your own conscience, not really impacting anything in a lasting and significant way.
 - iii. **The real, abundant, and true life.... The life that is really life. (v.19)**
 1. The concluding clause (*so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life*) is closely linked with the similar phrase in verse 12, but with an interesting variation. The Greek *tēs ontōs zōēs* must be rendered *life that is truly life* (as NIV) or ‘life indeed’ (as RSV), bringing out its contrast with life propped up by so uncertain a support as riches.¹¹
 2. A life of material wealth is not the life that is really life. Instead, living in eternal life is the life that is truly life.
 - a. **This is why we define radical generosity as “living adventurously to impact my world.”**
- c. **What are we supposed to be radically generous with?**
 - i. **Time** - We all have 24 hrs in a day.
 1. One of the most spiritual things that we can do is prayerfully audit how we are spending our time. The time that God gives us is a limited commodity. It is also one that we are expected to use in honoring and glorifying God. So how we spend our time matters.

¹¹ Donald Guthrie, *Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 14, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 132.

2. Does this mean that there is no room for relaxation or hobbies? Absolutely not. I love Paul's note at the end of v. 17, "to enjoy." God has created us to take delight in all sorts of things in this life that he has created and given to us. We just need to be aware that we are so prone to exaggerate the good gifts of God and turn them into idols.
 3. Is there time in your life for delight in God, serving in ministry, and loving and caring for your neighbor?
- ii. **Talents** - Abilities, skills, and passions.
 1. A second resource that God has given to all of us is our talents. We can also think of this as including abilities and passions. We can hoard these for our own selfish gain just as with any other resource. However, that is exactly what Paul warns against.
 2. What are you good at? What is your passion? – The answers to these questions shouldn't just lead us to our vocations or hobbies, they should be gateways into generously serving the Lord and our neighbors.
 - iii. **Treasure** - Financial & Material Resources
 1. It is so easy to think about our financial and material resources on a sliding scale. That is, it is so easy to look at someone else whom we perceive to have more than ourselves and default to the idea that financial and material generosity is on them and not on ourselves. Yet, the Bible doesn't let us off the hook here.
 2. "Ready to share" – Paul reminds us of the posture that a generous person is supposed to adopt. Jesus praises the widow's mite (Luke 21:1-4) as sacrificial and exceedingly more generous than anything else given that day. The Bible reminds us that God is not concerned with the amount that you give. He is deeply concerned with the heart and attitude of your giving.
 3. We all have treasure. Yes, some have more than others. But just like time and talents, we are called by God to be generous with our treasure.
 - d. **Spirit-led questions to consider when it comes to radical generosity.**
 - i. **Can I name specific ways that I'm leveraging my time and resources to make an eternal impact wherever God places me?**
 1. The key here is being specific, not general or ambiguous.
 - ii. **Do I have the margin to intentionally cross cultural, social, and other barriers to listen to others and respond to the needs of others?**
 1. Just like with money, we can't spend time that we don't have. And if we don't have margin, we can't respond to holy interruptions and opportunities. This means that we need to get much better at saying no to a whole bunch of good things so that we can say yes to the best things.
 - iii. **Am I compelled by God's radical generosity to invest my finances deeply in the work of the Kingdom?**
 1. We are reminded once again that God doesn't need our money. Instead, what we do with our money speaks volumes about what we think about God. We do not serve a God of "not enough." We do serve a God who has been radically generous to us, and invites us to partner with and invest in the kingdom. It isn't about the amount; it is about the heart and attitude.