**Series OVERVIEW**

In this 3-week series, we’ll encourage people to defy the gravitational pull of our “me-first” culture that keeps so many followers of Jesus from growing in generosity. We’ll reinforce the Generosity Ladder that we introduced last year, and we’ll also bring back concepts from “Genetically Generous” to help people understand that being generous is part of our design for human flourishing. Our hope with this series is to help apprentices of Jesus grow in generosity.

**Static Research Requests (in order of priority):**

* **Commentary (WORD) on key passages.**
* **Relevant quotes that correspond with Big Idea.**
* **Intro/hook ideas (WOW)  that correspond with Big Idea.**
* **Illustrations/metaphors that correspond with the Big Idea.**
* **Practical responses/applications ideas. (WHAT NOW?)**
* **Pertinent brain/social science insight.**

**Week 1  | January 26, 2019 | The Pull of Culture**

**Scripture: Matthew 6:19-34, Galatians 5:16-26**

**Message Big Idea**Jesus reveals the way to defy the gravitational pull of our culture and live a life of generosity.

*19 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.* *22 “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!*

*24 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.* *25 “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? 27 Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?* *28 “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? 31 So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. -Matthew 6:19-34*

*16 So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.* *19 The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.* *22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other. -Galatians 5:16-26*

**Message Description**

When it comes to money and finances, the gravitational pull of our culture leads us to consume and/or worry.

Consume

Many of us are pulled to consume. In his book *Mastering Your Money,* Ron Blue defines a consumptive lifestyle as: “Simply spending more than you can afford, or spending more than you should, given your other goals and priorities.” (p. 122). As a society, we are bombarded every day with a hedonistic philosophy that says, “Enjoy it now! Live it up! You deserve this!” The mantra of the consumptive lifestyle is: “Live!”

The Holy Spirit will always nudge us to self-control (Galatians 5:16, 22). Rarely do the messages in our culture point us toward self-control. Instead, we are encouraged to give in to our appetites and consume. And as a result many of us end up with mounds of credit card debt, high interest loans, and a sense of helplessness about our financial situation.

It’s interesting that Jesus viewed our appetite for money/wealth/possessions as the chief competitor for our hearts (Matthew 6:24). There is danger in giving into the cultural pull of “consume.”

Worry

Others of us tend to be pulled more to worry. We see all the things that could go wrong in this world and fear we could be left destitute. We wonder: “Will I ever have enough? Will it continue to be enough? How much is enough?” The mantra of the worry lifestyle is: “Save!”

Jesus speaks to this too in Matthew 6:25-32. Part of living a life of faith means not giving in to the trap of worry and hoarding wealth and instead trusting God to provide for our needs.

The truth is most of feel the pull of both “consume” and “worry.” We might encourage people to put themselves on a spectrum with “consume” on one end and “worry” on the other to identify how they are influenced by these cultural messages.

The reality is both “consume” and “worry” have something in common. They both put “me” in the center of my life… which is the message of our “me-first” culture.

For the consumer this usually looks like 1) Live, 2) Save, 3) Give.

For the worrier this usually looks like 1) Save, 2) Live, 3) Give.

However, Jesus teaches us a counter-cultural way of life that can free us from both “consume” and “worry.” Jesus’ teaching was always counter-cultural. (We might use some other examples from The Sermon on the Mount to illustrate this.) In Matthew 6:33, Jesus tells us the way to resist the gravitational pull of our culture when it comes to wealth and possessions. He tells us to “seek first the Kingdom of God.”

In order to defy our “me-first” culture, we have to put something else first. Jesus says that something should be the “Kingdom of God.” We’ll want to describe what the “Kingdom of God” is and what it means to put it first in our lives. The Kingdom of God is the sphere in which what God wills is done. If we use the spectrum earlier, we could illustrate “Kingdom First” living above the line in a way that draws us up out of the gravitational pull of our culture.

When it comes to money and finances, “Kingdom First” living looks like 1) Give, 2) Save, 3) Live.

At the end of this message we can briefly introduce the Generosity Ladder as a tool that can help us defy gravity and overcome the pull of our culture. We’ll teach more in-depth on this tool in Week 3.

**Week 2  | February 2, 2019 | Created to Climb**

**Scripture: Genesis 1:26-30, John 3:16, Mark 10:45, 2 Corinthians 9:6-11**

**Message Big Idea**

We are created to defy the gravitational pull of our culture by living generously.

*26 Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”* *27 So God created mankind in his own image,  in the image of God he created them;* *male and female he created them.* *28 God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”* *29 Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. 30 And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so. -Genesis 1:26-30*

*16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. -John 3:16*

*45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. -Mark 10:45*

*6 Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. 7 Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. 9 As it is written:* *“They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor;* *their righteousness endures forever.”* *10 Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. 11 You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. -2 Corinthians 9:6-11*

**Message Description**

We all feel the pull of our culture to consume and/or worry about money, but we were actually created for something different. We were created to be generous. During this message we’ll help people see that as human beings, we flourish when we are generous because we’ve been made in the image of a generous God.

God is generous.

* We see God’s generosity in Creation. God gave us life, provisions, and his presence (Genesis 1:27-30).
* We see God’s generosity in the Cradle (John 3:16).
* We see God’s generosity in the Cross (Mark 10:45). (Aside: Isn’t it interesting that as Jesus gave his life on the cross, he was crucified between two criminals (Luke 23:32-43)? The men on his right and his left are traditionally referred to as “thieves.” We don’t know what they had stolen. Possibly money? Or possessions? Could it have been someone’s life? On the cross, the greatest Giver was surrounded by takers. And yet, in these last moments, his generosity even extends to a thief who was willing to receive it.)

God is generous. And we are made in the image of a generous God (Genesis 1:26-27). That means generosity is in our DNA.

We can illustrate how we instinctively resonate with generosity by telling a story or finding a video that illustrates generosity. Our hearts are moved when we see acts of generosity. We recognize the beauty in them. Acts of generosity impact us because they paint a picture of human flourishing. We are seeing how humans were created to express themselves. We are most “ourselves” when we are generous. Through our generosity, we reflect the image of God.

If time allows, we can briefly hit the “Genetically Generous” profiles in this message. All of us have generosity in our DNA, and we each have natural tendencies as to how we express this generosity. Survey: [mygenprofile.com](http://mygenprofile.com). Profiles website: <https://communitychristian.org/genetically-generous-survey/> (NOTE: We could make the Small Group Curriculum for this week go more in depth on the generosity profiles.)

The challenge in this message is to defy our culture and instead live out of our God-designed impulse to be generous. This is how we flourish as human beings! (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)

We were created to climb beyond the “me-first” gravitational pull of our culture to live generously. The Generosity Ladder can help us do that. In this week, we’ll briefly hit the Generosity Ladder, but leave a full explanation for Week 3. As we take the next steps on the ladder, we will be transformed into people who reflect the generous nature of our God. We will flourish as we become who we were created to be!

**Research Request:**

* Heart-tug generosity videos

**Week 3  | February 9, 2019 | Stepping Up Together**

**Scripture: 2 Corinthians 8:1-9**

**Message Big Idea**

Together we encourage and challenge one another to defy gravity and live generously.

*And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. 2 In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. 3 For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, 4 they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord’s people. 5 And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us. 6 So we urged Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. 7 But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving. 8 I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. 9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. -2 Corinthians 8:1-9*

**Message Description**

Paul wrote to the church in Corinth to challenge them to grow in the grace of giving. He tells them about a community of Christ-followers, the Macedonians, who against all odds excelled in generosity. These Macedonian Christians are described as in the middle of “a very severe trial” and living in “extreme poverty,” and yet they pleaded for the opportunity to give. They even gave “beyond their ability.”

How was this possible? They gave themselves first to the Lord, and then to others (v.5). As we said in week 1, they decided to seek first the Kingdom of God instead of giving into the “me-first” gravitational pull of culture.

How can we follow their example? By encouraging and challenging one another to climb the Generosity Ladder. In this message, we will explain each step of the Generosity Ladder in more detail than we did in weeks 1 and 2. The steps are:

* Give Something
* Give Generously
* Give Extravagantly

Hopefully we can recreate the pie chart we did last year with the percentage of people who 1) Give nothing, 2) Give something, 3) Tithe and show any progress that we’ve made over the past year by sharing updated numbers.

Following Jesus is not something we’re meant to do by ourselves. Jesus intends for his apprentices to encourage and challenge one another to grow in every area of their spiritual journey including generosity. Without the love, support, and accountability of a community; most of us will fall prey to the gravitational pull our our culture leading us to endless consumption and worry. But together we can defy gravity and live generously.

**Resources:**

* [Previous message](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1lYnBz_d_NqCB_h5q6tVrBuPMrdXZZw4U) from The Ladder series (2011)
* [Previous message](https://drive.google.com/open?id=17WJYimOC-DQ04zQCLViUOHSGeU4ojMnH) from last year’s In God We Trust series (2019)

**Research Requests**

* Metaphors or analogies for the three ladder steps.