**Defy Gravity - Week 3**

**Teaching Team Notes**

**Pre-Message: Reading of 2 Corinthians 8:1-9**

**Introduction: Ladders**

**(Ladder is on the stage)**

How far below zero did it get on \_\_\_\_ (pick the coldest day)? It was one of those days that I find myself asking “How in the world did people survive before basic inventions…like **fire** and the ability to control fire to create heat?” No one knows when fire was discovered and harnassed, but how did people survive when it got to \_\_\_ degrees below zero back in the day?

Or how did people live and before the invention of the **wheel**. Archeologist tell us the first known wheel came from Mesopotamia, around 3500 B.C. Before that travel only happened by foot! So, if you were born in Downers Grove you pretty much spent your whole life in Downers Grove!

Or what did people do before they had simple tools like this **ladder**? How did you get that frisbee up on the roof? Or a baseball stuck in the gutter? Or change a lightbulb. I guess you just… (jump 3 times trying to reach..). Some things were just impossible!

(Start climbing up ladder) But thanks to this invention (**in·vent** /inˈvent/ *(verb) “…*to create or design something that has not existed before…”**)** I am able to go places and do things I could not before. (Come back down the ladder). I want you to hold onto that idea – because I want to introduce you to an invention that can make what seems impossible, possible! This ladder is ~~just such~~ a tool. Because this is NOT just a ladder, this a **generosity ladder**.

See, I believe that 100% of us in this room WANT to be generous. We DESIRE to look back on our lives and be known as a giving and generous person. I don’t think there is a single person in this room that wants someone at their funeral to say, “That guy? He was the stingy-est man I ever met!” No, we WANT to be generous! But we don’t know how to get there. It seems impossible! Out of reach! And for lots of good reasons. And we’ve tried to do it on our own (jump 3x) but we just can’t get there.

**Series Recap**

We’re in the final week of our Defy Gravity series that is all about generosity.

We’ve talked about the gravitational pull of our culture toward hurry, worry, and consume. And because most of us are not thinking critically about this seemingly inescapable flow of our culture…It so easy for most of us to slip into a “Me-First” orientation when it comes to our finances.

As a result, many of us have found ourselves with stress, debt, broken relationships, etc. In fact, I think this me-first approach to money is the Some kind of visual for this… source? reason that **finances** are the **number**-**one** cause of **stress** of stress (73%) — more than politics (59%), work (49%) and family (46%)…I think so many of us are so stressed about money NOT because we don’t have enough, even though it feels that way to us, the stress comes from how we view our money and how we use our money.

But the good news is that Jesus points us to a better way. It’s to have a “Kingdom-First” mindset when it comes to money and generosity.

Last week we talked about how we are created to be generous because we are made in the image of a generous God…In other words, we are hard wired for generosity were were menat to be loving and giving people…And yet, so many of us still believe a life of generosity is impossible because we are so caught up in the fruitless and inexhaustable strain for “More.”

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

Earlier, we read the story about a group of people who, by our culture’s standards, should have seen generosity as impossible: the Macedonian Christians.

Paul describes their circumstances in no uncertain terms...He says they were facing “severe trial” and “extreme poverty.” Not just any trial or your run of the mill poverty…The situation in Macidonia was **Severe** and **Extreme.**

And yet, despite their circumstances, Paul commends them for their generosity. In 2 Corinthians 8:2 He says “In the midst of very severe trail, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity” severe trial, extreme poverty.” … Not just any generosity…**Rich** generosity!

And then he sets them apart as a model for other communities of Christ-followers to emulate.

(Pause)

How is this possible?

The math doesn’t seem to work out…Does it?

I mean, look at Paul’s equation for the Macidonian church with me…

(Build equation one part at a time on screen) should joy be in this?

Severe Trail + Overflowing Joy + Extreme Poverty = Rich Generosity?

This just doesn’t seem to add up…Anyone else feeling like you are missing something here?

How could people who were experinceing so much hardship and with almost zero materail resources live so generously? How could a group of people not just defy the cultural gravity of consumerism but also the crushing wieght of trail and poverty?!!

How is this possible???

(Pause)

Well, in order for us to understand this amazing thing that is happening in the Macedonian Church I think we need to look at this passage a little differently.

There is so much we could say about this but I want to focus in on two key components that I think will help us see the make-up of the macedonian heart and give us a path for experining the same transformation in our own lives.

So first, I think the only way we can begin to understand this kind of radical, gravity-defying generosity is if we start where Paul finishes…

In verse 9 Paul describes what has been Done for us…

“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 8:9

The reason the Macidonian Church was able to defy the the me-first gravity and become a radically loving and generous community…AND the reason we can do the same….is because we are following in the footsteps of the one who made the ultimate move of generousity. Jesus.

Motivated by his incomprehensible love for us, Jesus made the most incredible gravity-defying move from the highest of highs to the lowest of lows so that we could share in the riches of heaven right now.

This is a theme throughout scripture and a central piece of Jesus’ ministry…

I love the way Paul describes this same idea in another one of his letters to another church in Philippi.

**“**Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God but didn’t think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became *human*!Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn’t claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that—a crucifixion.” Phil. 2:5-8 MSG

Jesus’ coming, living and dying was the ultimate act of generosity…An act so powerful that it has the power to rewire our hearts, reframe our minds and restore our souls….

This incredible cosmic generosity from our loving father is what releases us from the grip of a me-first perspective into the freedom and joy of a kingdom first perspective…

So how is the kind of generosity we see in the Macedonian Church possible? Well, first…like the Macedonians, we have to see what has been done for us and second we need to see what has been given to us as a result.

So after starting in verse 9 lets go all the way back up to verse 1…

“And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches” 2 Cor. 8:1

Paul frames the Macedonians Generosity as a “Grace” that had been “Given” to them…

So what does this mean?

Grace is one of the Bible’s ‘big’ words—so big, in fact, that we often fail to realize all the nuance and layers of meaning it has for us.

Paul uses the Greek word for grace 5 times in these brief 9 verses and he uses it in different ways…He uses it to describe Favor (v.1), as privilege (v.4) and a generous undertaking (v.6,7) and finally as a generous act (v.9).

Often when people talk about ‘grace’ in church circles they are referring simply to the undeserved love and power which God gives to people who find their way back to Him. Now, That remains central and vital. But Paul also uses the word in what seems to us (though probably not to him) a different way, as in this passage: to refer to what God wants to do not just *in* and *for* Christ-followers but *through* them.

What does it mean that God gave ‘this grace’ to the churches in Macedonia? It didn’t simply mean they had what we would call a wonderful spiritual experience. It meant that, under an impulse which came from God himself, they gave with almost reckless generosity.

No one had to push them…In fact; Paul expresses the desire to hold them back

They were desperately poor, and had suffered serious persecution; these two things may have gone together, since the persecution may have included loss of jobs and income for some. But such was their devotion to Jesus, the mission of helping people find their way back to God and the church, that they found it in their hearts to give not only according to their means but way beyond.

This kind of radical and selfless act of love can only happen when we truly understand what Jesus has done for us and then receive the grace he has given to us…All of which he asks us to share with others as it has been shared with us.

Then our lives can become a joyful overflow…regardless of our circumstance…just like it was for the Macedonians.

**“Excel in the Grace of Giving”**

Then, if we let it, this transformation from a “me-first” mindset to a “Kingdom-first” mindset will permeate all areas of our life…

And Paul begins his challenge to the church in Corinth with an encouragement in this regard…(v.7a on screen 7But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you…”)

Paul says that he has seen this transformation all over their lives and community…God has been and is doing great things in them… in their faith, their speech, their knowledge, and their love.

But Paul doesn’t stop there …He reminds them to “See to that they also excel in the grace of giving.” (put all of v. 7 on screen adding “see that you also excel in the grace of giving.”)

The work of transformation is not complete until it fills every area of our lives…Just like life in our physical homes would not work if oxygen didn’t fill every room …Our life and mission as christ-followers can not thrive without the grace and transformation Jesus offers filling every area of our lives.

And church in Corinth had experienced a lot of transformation but it had neglected the grace of giving…And Paul is calling them out and calling them forward.

He is calling them to excel in giving just as they have in other areas.

To excel in something usually requires intentional practice. Think of it like learning to play an instrument. We have to practice. As we master one step, we move on to the next.

So, how can we do this with generosity?

**Need better transition**

**The Generosity Ladder**

Well, this brings us right back to this tool that can make possible something that feels impossible – the Generosity Ladder.

This section is way too familiar.

Jokes need to be different.

Different illustration of percentage giving/tithing.

Put names of steps on ladder. (Need signs)

Need to have a different visual for percentages. Just do something on PPT.

Compare numbers to last year.

**Step 1 – Give Something**

If you are going to put this tool to work, the first step is getting on this ladder and you do that by giving something. *(Step 1 – Give Something)*

And that first step is much, much harder than it sounds. Let me explain by talking about our church for a minute. I’m going to give you the inside scoop. I called our financial officer and asked him: “How many households do we have at our location?” And they said that we had **­­\_\_\_\_** households that call COMMUNITY at Downers Grove their church home.

* So then I asked, “How many of those households gave nothing to the church in 2019?” (I didn’t ask for names, just numbers/percentages) And they told me that \_\_\_ % gave nothing to the church as far as we can tell. (They might be giving cash, we can’t track that).
* Now, I got to be honest with you, when I saw that number I was a little disappointed. (pause) But on the other hand, the fact that \_\_\_\_ % of our community has yet to give means we have a lot of room for growth.

So this group right here, right now - they're not on the ladder. And if that is you step number one is to get on the generosity ladder. In other words, give something.

The way you do it is by picking a specific amount. I don't have any Bible verse for this, but I have some experience and maybe a little bit of wisdom so I'm suggesting if you’re a regular attender start by giving $100 a month. I would suggest $100/month because what we’ve found is that if it doesn’t cost you something it’s not likely to be as meaningful. Disclaim this for some (i.e. homeless) who this is not realistic.

And for most of us, to give $100 a month means we would have to rearrange our life a little bit. We'd have to change…

* Our viewing habits,
* Our entertaining habits,
* Maybe our caffeine intake.

It’s going to require an adjustment, -- and that's why I would say start with $100/month.

So, if you aspire to be a generous person the first rung on this ladder is to give something.

**Step 2 – Give Generously**

Here's something else we found out. We found out that ­­\_\_\_\_ % of households here do give something. They aren’t giving a tithe, but they are giving something.

You might be in this group?

* Maybe you gave a spontaneous gift recently because you saw a need in the moment.
* Maybe you gave out of emotion on a day when your heart was moved.
* Or maybe you gave out of embarrassment because someone drew a pie chart. ☺

If you are in this group, here’s what I want to challenge you to take the next step and give generously *(Step 2 – Give Generously)* …to step up to “percentage giving.”

Now, why would I suggest that? I would suggest that because when you give out of emotion instead of giving intentionally, you have a tendency to think you're giving more than you're really giving. We tend to remember that time that we gave $20 or $100, but that may have been 18 months ago. And here’s the truth: it doesn’t take a whole lot of faith to give like that. But what can actually make a difference in here *(point to heart)* and grow your heart for God is to give generously and consistently by moving up to percentage giving.

This is exactly what we did last year. Is it too soon? This needs to be something different. The Bible calls that tithing. Let me illustrate tithing, ok? I have in my hand, 10 one-dollar bills. Here is the pattern we see in scripture. The pattern is that every time God gives you this *(hold up all 10)*, you take one of them *(take $1)* and you invest it in his church to further the mission of helping people find their way back to God. (pause) Now, I know that was fast so let me do it again. Ok? ☺ Every time you get 10 of these, you take one of them and you say, "I'm going to give that to my local church."

Most of us would look at what we have left and think, "I get to keep all nine of these? Oh, that's too much. Here, take another...” ☺

That doesn’t seem too hard, does it? -- When it's just one dollar, it's not that hard because what can you buy with a dollar? -- The problem comes when these become $10 bills. You can buy something with a $10 bill, right? A $10 bill buys you what? A ½ a latte, right? Yet, you still think to yourself, “You know Jesus gave his life for me. He made a way for me to find my way back to God. He gives me air to breath. I can sacrifice a latte or two!” And so we still give the $10.

But then these become $100 bills. *(wave bill around in a comedic way)* And then you sort of want someone to see it when you put one of these in the offering bag, don’t you?

And here's where the real rub comes in… when these become $1,000 bills. If this is a $1000 bill -- you want some change back from God. Like he’s a waiter you tip after a good meal.

I think we get freaked out by the zeroes. But we all need to understand something: God is not freaked out by the zeroes. He doesn't care about the zeroes. What he cares about is what this *(hold dollar bill)* represents in your heart. Remember Jesus says, ***“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”***

If you are in this group that gave something, I want to challenge you to take the next step to give generously…percentage giving…try tithing.

**Step 3 – Give Extravagantly**

I also found out here at Downers Grove, about \_\_\_% of our households are likely tithing – giving 10% or more of their income.

For those of who have made it to the middle of this ladder, the challenge today is to continue growing in generosity by *(Step 3 – Give Extravagantly)* taking the step to give extravagantly.

As you move up the ladder, what begins to grow in your heart is a desire to be a more generous giver. My guess is that those who tithe or more know exactly what I’m talking about -- because at this point you are proactively looking for places to be generous!

**Conclusion**

Let me wrap up with this…I was thinking about the Macedonian Church, our church and the Apostle Paul. I wonder what the apostle Paul would say if he were to write a letter to our church?

I think he might say something like, “Community Christian Church, I LOVE that you are exel in hpftwbtG, I LOVE that you excel in reaching out to kids and students; and I LOVE that you excel in church planting! (pause) but then Paul would look us boldly in the eye and challenge us to step up and say, **“…but see to it that you also excel in the grace of giving.”**

Let’s all of us. Everyone of us step up together!

**Communion Idea:**

AS we move to celebrate and receive communion together I am reminded that we have an incredibly generous God.

In communion we remember that God gave up 100% for us…Even His very life was given up for you and me…

And he did that so each of us could receive the freedom that only He can give. Paul Describes it this way in Philippians 2:9-11

Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor  
    and gave him the name above all other names,  
**10**that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
    in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
**11**and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
    to the glory of God the Father.

The call for us now is to simply receive this gift from God through Jesus…Take it in...Just take it in just like you take in this bread and this cup…And let it become a part of you…changing you…metabolizing into the same radical attitude of generosity we see in Jesus.