

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

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Radical Generosity

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Hey, this is Mark Batterson, pastor of National Community Church, welcome to our podcast and thanks for being a part of our extended family. We're in a series called 'Yes and Amen'. And we're casting vision for where God is taking us as a church. If you'd like to be a shareholder in that vision checkout <https://theaterchurch.com/vision> Enjoy the message.

When I was a senior in college, our basketball team had a road game in Kansas City, Missouri and I did something I had never done before. I bought a book; I bought a book not assigned by a teacher. I bought a book with my own money. It was an 800 page biography of Albert Einstein. And I started reading that biography and I never stopped. I'd read about 200 books that year. I'd keep that pace over the next 15 years. Now, fast forward July 5th, 1994 Jeff Bezos launches an online bookstore with a strange name, Amazon.com. This is a book lovers dream come true. Are you kidding me? I can buy books without even going to a bookstore. Listen, I was one of their best customers, in fact; they once sent me a gift. They do not do this anymore. I got a mug; I still remember what it said. It said 'live as if you'll die tomorrow, learn as if you'll live forever'. Unreal. And so, Amazon became one of my best friends. Then in 1997, Amazon.com went public and I thought long and hard about getting in on that IPO, but I made a decision to invest in a penny stock instead. Now it was a gold mining company in Canada, they were about to strike gold. Yeah, right. Good thing I was not born during the gold rush of 1849. Okay. I would have been a 49'er. Long story short, few years later that mining company bankrupt and Amazon.com of course would become the world's largest retailer online by revenue, now, hold that thought.

In the world of finance, two kinds of cost, actual cost and opportunity cost. And we talked about this last weekend and I want to get us back in the same mindset in an actual cost it's an expenditure on a balance sheet, it shows up as a liability. And this is relatively easy to account for. An opportunity cost, now that's a hidden cost, it's the loss of potential gain often because of indecision or inaction or sometimes even a bad decision like the one that I made. Now, failing to invest in Amazon did not incur any actual cost. But, I decided to do a little bit of math to throw a little pity party for myself. Now it was not much money, it was not much money, but if I had invested in Amazon IPO price \$18, it would've returned 49000%, it would be worth two point \$5 million. God bless you. We'll see you next week. Wow. Little depressing right there. But here's the deal, most of us pretty good at calculating actual costs, opportunity costs, not so much. In fact, I would say spiritually speaking, this is counting opportunity costs it's a moral calculation that involves a measure of faith. You can maintain the status quo and there is no actual cost, but faithfulness is not holding the fort. You can do nothing wrong, still do nothing right. That's why at NCC we want to be more known for what we're for than what we're against. Listen, we happen to believe that the church ought to solve the city's problems for them and that we ought to bless our city to the third and fourth generation. Here's the bottom line, if you stay in the boat, you will never walk on water, nothing ventured, nothing gained.

Well, welcome to National Community Church, this weekend we wrap up our series 'Yes and Amen'. If you have a Bible, you can turn over to 2nd Corinthians chapter eight and we'll get there in just a couple of moments. Three weeks ago I talked about two trains; you remember them 'so far, so God' and 'the best is yet to come'. Remember this? God's faithfulness is pursuing us from the past. God's sovereignty is bearing down on us from the future and then we live where these two theologies and realities meet, it's a place called 'the promises of God'. And as the children of God, listen, those promises belong to us. 2nd Corinthians 1:20

²⁰ *"And no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ". And that's amazing but the verse doesn't end there, it says; "Through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God".*

In other words, we have to add the amen and we're going to do that in a very unique way this weekend. Two weeks ago, I cast vision for our next chapter as a church attempting to do what we've never done before. We have turned a crack house into a coffee house. We've turned an abandoned apartment building into the DC Dream Center, but we have never turned a city block, this 127 year old car barn into a prototype campus, into kids' ministry space that will be a child development center and into a mixed use marketplace and a co-working space. This is a God size vision and we would not have it any other way. Here's what I know for sure, God's vision for this church, bigger than ours and God wants us to be a bigger blessing to our city. Listen, we are here for such a time as this. We are here for such a place as this.

2nd Corinthians chapter eight, verse seven, here we go.

⁷ *"But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love that we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving."*

Now, this English word, excel, it comes from the Greek word perisseuō and it means a over and above or beyond all measure. This is Ephesians 3:20, *"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine."* This is Jesus feeding 5,000 with five loaves and two fish and then having more left over than he started with. Perisseuō is five plus two equals 5,000 remainder 12.

That word in Greek reminds me a little bit of this Japanese concept called kaizen, it means continuous improvement. Now in psychology, this would be a growth mindset in business this would be bench-marking. And what I love about that is this, you never really arrive, and I said this a couple of weeks ago, when you have a God-sized vision, you never get there. Why? Because you grow with the vision and then the vision grows with you.

Paul identifies five lead measures, if you will in this passage, faith, speech, knowledge, authenticity, and love and then he adds a sixth measure to spiritual maturity and it's this idea of generosity. He says, see that you also excel in this grace of giving. Now please note it does not say this law of giving, this is the grace of giving. Grace is the genesis of generosity. In fact, if you want a definition, generosity, it's just the overflow of God's grace in our lives that we let spill over on every body else. And so how do we excel? How do we grow in this grace of giving?

Last weekend I talked about four levels of generosity. You can jot these down in case you missed them.

- Level one, giving spontaneously
- Level two, giving consistently.
- Level three, giving proportionately
- And then level four, giving radically.

Now, let me quickly recap. Level one, level two. Level one, giving spontaneously, now this is spirit led generosity. Spirit led does not mean poorly planned, okay? This involves some budgeting. You actually have to create financial margin so that when these opportunities present themselves, you can step into it with God's grace. Paul says this about the Macedonians, it says this was totally spontaneous, entirely their own idea and caught us completely off guard. During this series, challenging those of you that call this your church home, to make a pledge. You've been praying over this card for the last three weeks and I want you to add your amen to the vision that God has given us and we'll do that at the end of our services.

But can I tell you what else I'm praying? I'm praying that no one would give for the wrong reason. What's the wrong reason? I think it's any reason other than the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Please do not give out of external pressure, that is not who we are. We are not going to change who we are, that's who we've been for 23 years that is not how we roll. Spontaneous giving is not outside in, it's inside out. It's allowing the Holy Spirit to guide us and lead us. And if you want to put some fun back in your finances, this is so great because when you follow these promptings, you get to participate in the miracles that God is doing. Your giving is someone else's miracle.

Now level two is giving consistently and consistency beats intensity seven days a week and twice on Sunday. If you want to grow in any area of your life, you need some consistent habits, there's just no other, no other way. If you want to get in shape, you need a regular routine, you got to go to a place called the gym or at least work out at home and if you want to exercise your giving muscle, it's the same, same idea. Now Lora and I have put this idea into practice, kind of the consistency piece by setting something up called automatic withdrawal and so we don't even see it, it just automatically goes to NCC. And does that mean we stop giving spontaneously? Well, no, we still follow those leadings but what consistent giving does is it establishes this baseline or even a trend line of generosity. Okay. I think we're caught up with ourselves. Are you ready for level three? Level four? We're going to get our game on. Okay. And, some of these I'm not going to be able to totally deep dive this. Okay? But we are going to do a May term, going to unpack these ideas a little bit more. I'll do some teaching, we'll have a panel, do some Q and A, and so if you want to grow in the grace of giving certainly some more opportunities to do that.

Okay, level three is giving proportionately. Now in verse 11 of 2nd Corinthians eight, Paul says, give in proportion to what you have. Now sometimes when you're reading the Bible, what helps is to notice what it doesn't say. It does not say give in proportion to what you don't have. But let's be honest, I think a lot of us let what we don't have dictate what we do. Do not let what you cannot do keep you from doing what you can. In Luke 21, Jesus celebrates this widow who gives two small coins in the first century. The smallest coin was called a lepton. Its diameter was the

size of a pencil eraser and it was worth, are you ready for this, six minutes of an average days wage? In other words, this woman gave the equivalent of 12 minutes of time in money. And yet Jesus says this, I tell you the truth, this poor widow has given more than all the rest of them for they have given a tiny part, a tiny proportion, a tiny percentage of their surplus, but she poor as she is, has given everything, that sounds like a hundred percent to me, has given 100% of what she has. And so here's the deal, she gave the smallest amount, but it represented the greatest, proportion. And that's who Jesus celebrates. The true measure of generosity is not determined by how much you give. The true measure of generosity is determined by how much you keep giving spontaneously, a great start, giving consistently a wonderful next step. But if you want to grow in the grace of giving, you cannot think in dollar amounts, you have to think in percentages.

Now with that is a parameter I want to talk about something called the tithe. Now, some of you are very familiar with that, others of you, no idea what that is. The word tithe, it literally means 10% before I say anything else, let me say this, if you grew up in a church that was legalistic, I would be willing to bet that that word actually has some negative connotations to it, creates a little internal tension inside. Why? Because legalism focuses on the law. Again, what we're talking about is the grace of giving the tithe is not a threat. The tithe is a promise and if it causes your blood pressure to go up, then we need a little paradigm shift right here. Actually it should probably cause a little rush of adrenaline because it's about to get exciting. Okay, here we go.

Alright, let me reverse engineer this idea. The tithe is as old as Abraham and so it's pre-Sinai, it's pre-law and that's significant. Abraham has an encounter in Genesis 14 with Melchizedek. He is the priest of Salem and this is what theologians would call a preincarnate appearance of Christ. His name literally means King of Righteousness. And he does two things when he encounters Abraham. One, he blesses him, and two; he serves him bread and wine, huh. This is foreshadowing something that we call communion. And so what does Abraham do in response to this blessing and to this communion? Well, it says that he gave Melchizedek a 10th of all he owned, huh. Now fast forward about 1500 years and the prophet Malachi challenges the people of Israel to give proportionately. And it comes with this incredible promise. Malachi 3:10, it says,

¹⁰ "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it."

This is the only place in scripture where God explicitly tells us to test him. How? By giving him the tithe. Again, tithe means that 10% but it's not any 10% it's the first 10%. Now the technical term here is first fruits. In the Old Testament, in an agricultural society, they would actually harvest 10% of the field go and give that tithe and then come back and harvest the rest of it. Do you see where I'm going with this; that this was an exercise in faith. This was their way of saying, God, we're going to put you first and then we're going to trust you for what they called the second harvest. Tithing is trusting and that's how you grow in a relationship with God. And here's what you discover along the way, you cannot out give God. Now God is not a slot machine, okay? You cannot play God and if you give for the wrong reasons it doesn't even count, but if you give for the right reasons, listen, it is game on. Here's what I know for sure God

can do more with 90% than we can do with a hundred percent and I promise you this, the more you give, the more you will enjoy what you keep. And let me say this, we would not preach what we do not practice as a church. Historically, we have given about 17% of our general income as a church to kingdom causes that are not NCC. Why? Because we have a core conviction. God's going to bless us in proportion how we give to missions in proportion and care for the poor in our city. As long as we are investing our time and our talent and our treasure in things that are near and dear to the heart of God, I am not worried about our bottom line as a church. Yes, we are trying to build this city block. Yes, we would love to do it debt free and it is stretching our faith. But can I tell you what we would never not do? We would never dial down our missions giving. Are you kidding me? We would be shooting ourselves in the foot in fact we want to grow more so we can give more, that is the heartbeat of this church. And so we are standing corporately as a church on this same promise that then we stand on personally.

Let me say one more thing, a couple of years ago decided to run a marathon to celebrate God healing my asthma after 40 years and here's what I did not do. I did not go out and run 26.2 miles. I did 72 training runs over six months and then and only then was I able to finish that marathon. I know that when I talk about 10% for some of you, you're already doing that, but for others, I mean this feels like, wow, that is a stretch. This feels like a 26.2 mile marathon, totally get that. You are trying to get out of debt. You're trying to make ends meet. You can't imagine running a marathon. Listen, I want to remind us that we have a God who celebrates two small coins. Okay, let's start there. This is a God who celebrates every step in our journey, whether it's giving spontaneously or then consistently or even proportionately. Growing in the grace of giving, it doesn't happen overnight, it might take a minute. All I'm saying is I think it'd be wonderful if we just kind of set our sights on that 10% tithe.

Alright, let me talk a little bit about level four. How are we doing? Okay. Level four is giving radically. Paul juxtaposes the poverty and generosity of the Macedonians. It's almost like this oxymoron and he says this, he says their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity and then he says they gave as much as they were able even beyond their ability. When Lora and I got married, we made a decision that we would never not tithe. It was a pre-decision and it was inspired by this promise and Malachi and I'll connect the dots. We just believed that promise is part of this package deal that no matter how many promises God has made, they are yes in Christ. And so when we give God the tithe, what we're doing is we're adding our amen to the promise that God has made. I think it's one of the best decisions we've ever made. But if I'm being honest, I think that I thought that the tithe was the end goal. Maybe that was the finish line and I think what I discovered is that it might be a starting line.

Let me make this personal. That penny stock that I invested in my twenties, I want you to know I also traded options and they traded stocks for quite some time and I'm going to tell you why, because I wanted to get rich quick. Can I just be honest with you and I bet you have been there and done that. I don't think my head and my heart was it the right place. I think I was focused more on maybe, you know, making a quick buck or even financial independence and nothing wrong with that, than I was on giving, I'm going to tell you what happened, around that time discovered a biography about JC Penney. JC Penney, founder of the department store by his name. By the end of his life, he lived till 95. He had 1600 department stores and they were worth about \$18 billion. Now you got to love this. The C in JC stood for cash. Huh? He had a lot of it,

but that is not what motivated him. By the end of his life, he was reversed tithing. When I mean by that is this, he was living off of 10%, he was giving 90%. And it was a paradigm shift for me, it's like a switch flipped and Lora and I stopped setting getting goals, started setting giving goals. In fact, set a goal of reverse tithing. Now, no guarantee we would ever get there, no idea how long that would take if we did. But we set our sights on a goal the someday we're believing that we'll be giving 90% of our income back to God.

Now, here's the key, because motivation here is so critical. The Apostle Paul says they did this out of their own free will and I love it. Sometimes these New Testament writers have kind of tip the cap to an Old Testament idea and you have to kind of hyperlink it. But, there was actually an offering in the Old Testament, a freewill offering and as the name suggest, not mandatory. This was over and above the 10% tithe. And I think this is what radical generosity is all about. Listen, this is not someone who just loves to give. This is someone who lives to give. This is someone who understands that, listen; I know there are people who say the tithe belongs to God. Totally disagree, all belongs to God. He just lets us keep 90%. Okay? It's all from God; it's all for God and I think that is the underpinning of radical generosity; to whom much is given, much is required.

Now here's the catch 22 the more you have, the harder it is to sacrifice. And that's where I want to challenge you to do just that. And that might be a double tithe that might be you setting your sights on this reverse tithe. And if you do this well, listen, well let me say this God doesn't bless us to raise our standard of living; God blesses us to raise our standard of giving. And when we do that, we discover what Jesus said; it is more blessed, it, it is happier to give than it is to receive. I think my prayer for each of us is that we would experience the joy on the giving side of life. And so let me hit the pause button right there. You guys are doing so good.

We talked about four levels of giving and I think the question is what level are you at? And then more importantly, what would be the next step in your journey of generosity. For some of you that may be giving spontaneously, it might be just creating some financial margin so that you can step into opportunities that God presents. For some of you, it might be giving consistently, it might be this recurring giving idea and you need to just take that step. I think for some, listen, it's this idea of testing God with the tithe that is one small step, one giant leap. And then some of you, you're ready to make the jump into hyperspace and you are ready to give above and beyond this level of the tithe. And wherever you're at what is that next step for you? And then would you be willing to take that step this weekend?

Here's what I've found in my spiritual journey and this is where I'm going to love on you. Okay? Which means I'm gonna push you a little bit. Here's what I found, I think that the way we grow in any area of our lives is by making commitments. Commitments are catalysts and that's really, I think what this pledge card represents. It's a catalyst. It's a commitment. Again, no one is going to come knocking if you're a guest, you are off the hook. But this is about each one of us discerning, God what do you want me to do? Here's what I know for sure you will not accomplish 100% of the goals you do not set. And you will not keep a 100% of the commitments you do not make. Okay? And so if you're part of this church family would just stretch your faith, would you make a sacrifice? Would you add your amen to this vision?

Now I want to bring this thing in for a landing. We have a God-size vision, it took a miracle to purchase this city block in 2014, unbelievable. But the way you steward a miracle, you believed God for even bigger and better miracles. We need another one. I would love... wouldn't it be a miracle if we could do phase two debt free? Now it's amazing, phase one fully funded. Why? Because of the generosity of people that have already stepped in and stepped up. So grateful, so inspired you have given year-end bonuses and tax refunds and down payments that you have saved for other things. And then listen, God is providing in some amazing ways. I had lunch with a pastor a couple of weeks ago just sharing a little bit of our vision. Last week a check for \$10,000 shows up. Unreal. Now, I can't wait for us to flip that blessing for another church. This week speaking to some commercial realtors had their national conference here in DC and they take up an offering for this vision. How great is that? So we have all of these shareholders that even from the outside God is providing, but I believe that the miracle is in the house. And so at this point, a 100% of our giving goes towards phase two the actual costs \$5 million, the opportunity cost; off the chart. This is going to be the best investment we make, thousands of kids; we're going to disciple in that space, compound interest to the third and fourth generation.

And so you can make a monthly pledge, it's a two year timeline. You can give a onetime gift. I talked a little bit last week about how Lora and I approach this. And you know, in 23 years of leading this church, this is the biggest hill that we climbed. And Lora and I felt like that means it needs to be the largest gift we've ever given. And we're excited about that. Whether you're single, you're married, you know, I think you pray about it, you think about it, you maybe talk with a spouse or a friend or a mentor, and then at some point it's just boom, like, all right, well let's take a step of faith and that's what this represents.

And so I want to ask our worship teams to come at all of our campuses. And then would you grab this pledge card? I want you to just put it in your hand. And what we're about to do, pretty unique, never done anything like this in 23 years. We are going to say a collective amen to the vision that God has given us. And some of you, God has given great capacity, would you stretch your faith? Some of you listen, you're in a tough spot, would you step in somehow? I can't make a pledge for you, you can make the pledge for me but I have a feeling that if we all step into this miracle, we are all going to be a part of the miracle that God wants to do. And so this is fun, we're gonna sing 2nd Corinthians one. We've been singing this song 'Yes and Amen' during this series and so we're gonna worship God with our singing. And then at the end of that song, we're going to worship God with our giving. And so maybe you came with that pledge card filled out and you're ready to do that, just hang onto it. You can pray over it and maybe you need a minute to fill it out and that's totally fine. And so we're going to worship God with this song and then at the end of that song, then our ushers are going to come at all of our campuses and I believe this is going to be a huge amen to the glory of God.

Can't wait to share with you what the Lord does. Thank you for your regular giving, thanks for giving over and above. Listen, I know this is not treasure. You traded time and talent for this and so you are putting a piece of yourself into this. So I want to pray for you.

Lord, right now, thank you for each person at all of our campuses, God, what a joy to have a second family, a spiritual family that we call church. Lord, I pray that each one of us would feel like we're a part of this vision coming to fruition, and God would you guide each one of us to

know the measure of sacrifice and the measure of faith that you want us to exercise. God, I pray that no one would give for the wrong reasons, but that God you would honor and bless and multiply and use these gifts for your kingdom purposes. And God, we pray that the way that you taught us to pray, may Your kingdom come, may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name. Amen.