Dec. 23rd Message: Investing Your Life

Scripture: Ephesians 2:1-10

Ephesians 2 paints a picture of Loving Generously that is uniquely Christian. Paul emphasizes that at one point, we were all “dead in our transgressions.” But Christ made us alive by atoning for our sins and making forgiveness and reconciliation with God a possibility for those who repent and place their faith in Him. Paul says it this way, “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved!”

Generosity begins with an understanding of who we are—we are those saved by grace. We are those who have been forgiven and saved...not because of our merit, but because of God’s mercy and unconditional love for us. Paul goes on to say that because of this gift of grace, we are now free to agents of God’s grace in the world. Here’s what he says in vs. 8-10: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

Grace leads to the freedom that is ultimately necessary to be truly generous. When we know ourselves to be forgiven, we no longer strive for acceptance. We no longer have something to prove in order to establish our identity. We no longer equate our value with our performance. We are unconditionally loved by God, we are forgiven, we are treasured, and we have an assurance of everlasting life. That freedom then propels us into a life of service and generosity for the sake of sharing the great love of God with a hurting world. That is Lindsay’s story...

Video: Lindsay (5:23)

Lindsay needed to accept the grace of her identity in Christ...not a striving for significance or a need to prove herself through her actions. According to her testimony, she received the grace of Jesus first, then she was able to live generously, to be missional with joy, and love without condition. Again...let me repeat this: She first received from Christ which led her to be as Christ in the world...she was freed to be fully invested. I emphasize this point so that you will resist the urge to be generous in order to be noticed or to gain merit in God’s eyes. That would be a false kind of generosity, and people can smell that kind of self-serving motivation from a mile away. As Christians, we love generously out of gratitude for what Christ has already invested in us...we are generous because Jesus is generous, and Jesus lives in us.

Now....some of us have come to a place in our lives where we are asking the question: what now? Perhaps we have achieved a level of financial stability or even financial abundance, but we still lack peace and contentment in our lives. We still lack the joy that we thought would come when we finally achieved our financial or vocational goals. We are now on the quest for “significance” more than success. Our next story features a couple who made some strategic and God-honoring decisions regarding their wealth, which led to great joy and truly significant investments. Take a look.

Video: Jailhouse Generosity (8:37)
For this family, and most families, making a move from success to significance required defining a limit...a threshold of wealth, a standard of living, that would be deemed, “Enough.” That threshold will look differently depending upon your context, but when we can agree upon what “enough” means, we can then begin to live very intentionally with the abundance that God has entrusted to us. If we don’t set a limit and honor that limit, we will inevitably adjust our lifestyles to consume the abundance, and we will continue to miss out on the joy of generosity. As Randy Alcorn writes, “God prospers me not to raise my standard of living, but to raise my standard of giving.” This family made a conscious decision to live modestly and invest in business as a means of investing in people for the glory of God. The joy they received in being generous led the inmates to experience the joy of being generous as well...and I think you could tell from the interviews with the inmates that their lives were absolutely being transformed. If God has entrusted you with significant wealth, or perhaps you have an acumen for business or leadership...whatever the case, consider the possibilities of using your gifts and your great abundance for the sake of bringing joy and hope to the world. It will require an investment of your life and your resources, but the payoff is eternal and profoundly satisfying.

Now...many of us are not financially stable...we have not met our vocational goals...and to some extent, we are struggling to make ends meet. Make no mistake, we, too, are called to live generously. Remember...loving generously is never about what we lack, it’s about using that which God has entrusted to us to be the Light of Christ. Rest assured, even more precious than millions of dollars is the prayer and the time that we invest into the lives of others. Our next story features an amazing Kingdom invester.

Video: Joy (5:22)

Joy is a woman of incredible insight and faith. She wasn’t lying when she said, “It is a daunting thing to replace hopelessness with hope.” Money doesn’t defeat hopelessness. You can throw money at a thousand hopeless situations and it will rarely fix what’s broken. To defeat hopelessness, we must begin with prayer. Only God can push back the darkness that holds sway over a person or a community. Joy also taught us that overcoming hopelessness in another person requires a “life-investment.” A life-investment is exactly what it sounds like: an investment of your life into the life of a another person or a group of people who are struggling. A life-investment will require us to set aside some of those “wants” that drain our energy, our time, and our resources so that we can be fully present and available for those who need our undivided time and attention. All too often we get this backwards. We invest our lives in our wants, our pleasures, and those things we think will bring us joy, and then we give a mere token towards eradicating hopelessness by serving in a soup-kitchen once a year, or we make an end-of-the-year donation, maybe we’ll donate a blanket at Christmas time, or if we’re feeling really generous, we’ll throw a $20 in the plate on Sunday. We invest 70-90% of our best time and energy into ourselves, and as a result, we invest less than 10% of our lives into God’s redemptive work because we have no margin. Now...let me ask you a good old Dr. Phil question: “How’s that working out for you?” If I had to guess, I would say that most of us who live generally self-serving lives lack joy. We occasionally experience pleasure, maybe a few moments of genuine happiness, but we lack a joy that endures. You see, true joy comes from a life-investment in others who then experience the grace of Jesus Christ through your life-investment in them. That’s exactly what we saw with Lindsay, and ______, and Joy. I know you saw those smiles...I know you saw those hugs...I know you saw something in those stories that you desperately long for. Listen friends: Jesus saved you so that you could have that abundant life...but you will never experience the abundant life by investing in yourself. God will frustrate that path at every
The abundant life…the life of significance, meaningful relationships, and joy comes only through our life-investment in others for God’s glory and the hope of the world. You may not agree...you may be convinced that you are just one more promotion away from the joy that you seek, or one more thrills-seeking experience, or whatever. I probably can’t change your mind, but I could tell you story after story that would prove you wrong. True happiness, joy and contentment comes about from investing our lives—which means our best energy, our precious time, our prayers, and our best thinking into the lives of people who are hurting and have real needs. When you experience the power of Christ working through you to bring hope to another person, you will finally come to understand the abundant life that Jesus promised us. It begins when we commit to loving generously.