

WRITINGS OF JEFFREY JEREMIAH

by Jeffrey Jeremiah

A collection of theological writings, sermons, and essays by Jeffrey Jeremiah, compiled for study and devotional reading.

3 Chapters

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S. Building a Life of Generosity

S. Taking Jesus at His Word

S. Building a Life of Generosity - 2Co_8:1-9

"Building a Life of Generosity"

2 Corinthians 8:1-9

We've been in this series, "Building Your Life with Values That Last," looking at principles that enrich your life, that bring to fruition Jesus' promise, "I came that you might have and enjoy life, and have it in abundance, to the fullest, till it overflows." We've seen that among the values to build a great life on are faith, hope, and love. What's the best way to demonstrate, to live out those priceless values? By being a generous person, a person who's a giver, not a taker. 2 Corinthians 8:7 says, "Just as you excel in everything - in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness in your love for us - see that you also excel in this grace of giving." Did you know that generosity is the most talked about value in the entire Bible? The word "faith" (or its variations) is used 246 times in God's Word. "Hope" appears 185 times. The word "love" is used 733 times. "Give" or "giving" is used 2,285 times in the Bible. The Bible talks more about giving and generosity than any of those other principles. Why? Because giving is the expression of faith, hope, and love. Indeed, it's concrete, practical evidence of the abundant life, the life that's lived to the fullest as Jesus intended for you. I want to share with you today six benefits of being generous with your time, your talents, and your treasures.

First, giving helps you grow in godliness, it makes you more like God. The Bible declares over and over again that God is a giver. James 1:5 : "God gives to all generously and ungrudgingly." John 3:16 says, "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son." If you want to be a great lover, you've got to learn to be a great giver, because love and giving go together. It's possible to give without loving, but you cannot love without giving. We saw last week that one of the reasons love is the greatest of faith, hope, and love is because God is love. When you love as He loves, you're becoming more godly. In the same way, giving makes you more like God because God is a giver. Every time you're generous you grow in godliness.

Second, giving celebrates God's grace to you. Look at how verse nine describes it: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might be rich." Before the incarnation, the Son enjoyed the infinite, the limitless riches of heaven. Yet because of His grace, He gave it all up and for your sake, He became poor when He came to earth. Jesus became so poor that He had absolutely nothing to give away, nothing but His life. That's what Jesus came into the world to do, to give His life, to die, for you. He allowed Himself to be nailed to a cross; His blood, His life was poured out in a sacrifice so that you might become rich. Rich in salvation, rich in life, a life that enjoys forgiveness, a clear conscience, His supernatural resources of love, confidence, hope, and joy. By His grace, that's what God has done for you, for me. One of the surest marks of a heart that's been truly touched by God's grace is this: giving is considered a privilege, a celebration of gratitude and appreciation for all He's done for us in His Son. A third benefit of giving is that it breaks the grip of materialism on your life. Would you agree that we live in a culture that's pretty materialistic? That in this kind of

culture it's difficult to keep your priorities in order? It's helpful to remember that the spiritual driver of materialism is greed, the excessive, unsatisfied hunger to possess more and more and more things. The word "enough" is not in the greedy person's vocabulary, because it's never enough. Ecclesiastes 5:10 says, "Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income." What's the antidote? How do you keep from becoming so materialistic? There's only one antidote to materialism - giving. Every time you give, you're breaking the grip of materialism on your life. You're claiming a spiritual victory, you're making a subversive, counter-cultural move. When you're a generous person, you're saying, "I do not buy into the falsehood that life consists in the things I accumulate. I don't buy into the lie that my net worth and my self worth are one and the same thing." You break through to that victory every time you are generous.

Four, giving blesses you in return. We're all familiar with Jesus' words, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Do we really believe that? Isn't receiving really better? The idea that giving isn't as good is based on the assumption that giving involves losing and receiving involves gaining. According to the Son of God, that logic is flawed. Giving does not involve losing, it ultimately involves gaining. Each time you give, be it an act of love, a gift to someone in need, a service or ministry to the cause of Christ, that gift is not a loss to you, it's a gain. Look at what Deuteronomy 15:10 says, "Give generously and do so without a grudging heart, then because of this the Lord God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to" (also Proverbs 22:9). If you're taking notes, please circle "all" and "everything" on your outline. God says, "Do this, give generously, and with a grace-filled heart, a joyful heart, and I will bless all your work, and everything that you do." In God's economy, when you give you gain, when you don't you lose. The last two points are really an expansion of this fourth one.

Fifth, giving gives you the opportunity to expand your impact for Jesus Christ. The sowing/reaping analogy in 2 Corinthians 9:6 is helpful here. Giving is like the farmer who sows seeds in the spring. His harvest, his return is proportionate to his sowing. If he sows a small amount of seed, that's what he'll get back, a small harvest. If he sows bountifully he'll receive a prodigious harvest in return. It's the same with generosity. If you give just a little bit, then what you get will be a little bit, too. But if you give abundantly, what you get will be abundant, too. Because of this, you can give with anticipation, looking forward to what God is going to do through your generosity. Speaking of how He blesses generosity, verse 10 says, "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." As you give generously, God will bless you, but His plan is not to make you financially rich, but to maximize "your harvest of righteousness," the work, the support you bring to building up the cause of Jesus Christ. With your generosity you can reach out with life-changing impact into your community, your country, and your world for your Savior and Lord.

Sixth, giving is an investment for eternity. Jesus said, "Do not store up for yourself treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven" (Matthew 6:20). He says you have a choice. You can store it up on earth or you can store it up in heaven. How do you invest for eternity? 1 Timothy 6:18-19 answers that question: "Use your money to do good...always being ready to share with others whatever God has given you. By doing this you will be storing up real treasure for yourselves in heaven...it is the only safe investment for eternity! And you will be living a fruitful Christian life

down here as well." Let me ask you a few questions I've been asking myself this past week: How much of what you do with your time, talents, and treasures is spent storing up treasure on earth? How much of what you do has a lasting impact into the next generation, 50 or 100 years after you're gone? How much of what you do has eternal significance? On the basis of God's Word, I can tell you that the greatest thing you'll ever do with your money is invest it in the cause of Jesus Christ, invest it in the Lord's work. You can have lasting impact with it in this life, and store up for yourself treasure that will await you in glory.

I have three concluding remarks. First, to those of you who are parents: I want to challenge you to let your children see you give. They see you make money. They see you spend money. They see you enjoy money. But do they ever see you give your money? That's why I encourage you, before you decide how you can participate in "A Time to Build," to have a family conference. Sit down and everybody join in. What do you want to give as a family? I think we all want our sons and daughters to learn to be generous, giving people. Second, by not being generous with our time, talents and treasures, we miss out on so many blessings that are promised to us by Christ. For example, Jesus said, "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and God will leave you high and dry." Is that what He promised? No! "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." Please, don't let the evil one, or fear or doubt rob you of one more minute of God's blessing if you haven't chosen to give as God encourages you. Finally, being a generous person is ultimately a spiritual, not a financial issue. Giving challenges and tests and stretches and ultimately strengthens faith and hope and love, what's in here. And that's ultimately what God's after, what's in your heart, your mind, your soul. The generous life reflects the growth, the development, the maturity of our lives as followers of His Son, recipients of the greatest blessings of heaven: salvation, the life abundant and eternal that is ours in Jesus Christ.

S. Taking Jesus at His Word - Joh_4:43-54

Sermon by Dr. Jeffrey Jeremiah

April 25, 2004 "Taking Jesus at His Word"

John 4:43-54

I received an email from a good friend this week that asked, "So, you think you're having a bad day?" "A woman came home to find her husband in the kitchen shaking frantically, with some kind of wire running from his waist towards the electric coffee pot. Intending to jolt him away from the deadly current, she whacked him with their son's baseball bat, breaking his arm in two places. Only then did she learn her husband had been happily listening to his Sony Walkman." "The average cost of rehabilitating a seal after the Exxon Valdez oil spill was \$80,000. At a special ceremony, two of the most expensively saved animals were released back into the wild amid cheers and applause from onlookers. A minute later, in full view, a killer whale ate them both." Bad days. We all have them. Regardless of our place in life, trouble, sorrow, tragedy and death come to us all. Job 5:6-7 was written by a man well acquainted with these realities: "For hardship does not spring from the soil, nor does trouble sprout from the ground. Yet man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward." Everyone experiences sorrows. There are no exceptions! The question is how will you respond to those difficult times? Will they define your life, defeat you, or suck the vitality and energy out of you? Or will you overcome them? The verses we've just read show how you can be an overcomer, even in the midst of difficult times, through faith in Jesus Christ. We see this overcoming faith in the example of a man described as "a certain royal official." He was an official in Herod's court, and therefore was a man of great influence and power. He also was a man of wealth, as John 4:51 tells us he had servants. Here was a man who by anyone's standards had everything he could possibly want, except for one thing - his young son was seriously ill. In fact, he was dying. As a result, this father's life was full of misery. Nothing can shatter us more quickly or more completely than suffering falling on our children. Nothing! I think all of us who are parents can identify with this man, this dad. The good news is that this father did more than acknowledge his great need, he also acknowledged and sought the solution. He had obviously heard about the miracle Jesus had performed at the wedding feast at Cana. John 4:47 says, "When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son." That verse is full of meaning. This royal official lived in Capernaum, on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. He left his home and made a four-hour trip (about 25 miles) to Cana, which is in the hill country. For the crowd that was there, it must have been a memorable scene when this royal official came face to face with Jesus. Imagine the rich appearance and the air of dignity that marked this official as he approaches Jesus, a poor man, a carpenter from Nazareth to ask a favor. But he didn't ask a favor. He begged Jesus for one. The Greek word translated "begged" speaks to a continuous action. It means that before a crowd of people, this nobleman was at the feet of Jesus begging repeatedly for him to heal his son. In his encounter with Jesus we see three stages in the faith of this suffering father.

First, there is a sense in which this father's faith is remarkable. He has traveled 25 miles to request a healing miracle from Jesus. But Jesus sees something different. He saw a weak faith that needed to be challenged and corrected. You see, the official believed Jesus was able to heal his son. But he placed a limit on how Jesus could heal. He begged Jesus to come to Capernaum to do this miracle. He thought it was necessary for Jesus to be physically present, to touch his son in order to heal him. That weakness is behind Jesus' reply: "Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders, you will never believe" (verse 48). On the surface His words seem detached, cold, and unsympathetic. This grieving father had poured out his heart to the Lord, and now Jesus basically rebukes him (and the crowd as well). In reality, Jesus' words were mercifully surgical, because with unerring accuracy He identified the weakness. This faith was focused on what Jesus could do; specifically, what Jesus could do that he could see with his own eyes. His was focused on the healing; on the "signs and wonders" to the extent that he was missing the point: who is Jesus? He's God! Even today, those who are constantly seeking signs and wonders and miracles to confirm their faith may be missing the point - to know Jesus as Savior, Lord and God. Jesus' words were a test of the man's sincerity. How did he react? He simply stood his ground, reiterated his need and humbled himself to receive the answer in whatever way Jesus chose to give it to him. Here is the first answer to the way in which you can find triumph in the midst of sorrow and tragedy: trust Jesus enough to allow Him to operate in whatever way He chooses.

Second, we see growing faith strengthened (John 4:50-51). In response to this desperate father's request, Jesus says, "You may go. Your son will live." Notice what Jesus does, and does not do. He says the son is healed, but, He refuses to go to Capernaum, and He gives this man no sign, nothing he can see that will confirm this healing. What did that man think when he heard those words? How would he respond? John 4:50 says, "The man took Jesus at his word and departed." Something radical happened inside that man at that moment, and I use the word radical in the sense of something happening deep inside, at the very core of this man's being. What happened is the opposite of a very common phrase in our world today: "Seeing is believing." In other words, don't believe it until you see it. That may be what the world thinks, but the teaching of Jesus is that in the spiritual realm the order is reversed, and that believing is seeing, for it is only as one believes in Jesus that he sees spiritual things happening. In that father's life at that moment, believing was seeing. Even though there were 25 miles between them, in his mind's eye he "saw" his little boy well and healthy again. The second answer to the way you can find triumph in sorrow and difficulty: believe first, then you will see the results. As Hebrews 11:1 declares, "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (NIV). Believing is seeing.

Third, we see a strong faith acted out. The official departs the scene. If he had immediately returned to Capernaum after meeting with Jesus, he would have arrived at home Acts 5:00 that evening. But that's not what he does. Reading from John 4:51 : "While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living. When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, 'The fever left him yesterday at the seventh hour.'" The father leaves Jesus but doesn't return home until the next day! The day after meeting Jesus, he learns that at the time he had spoken to Jesus, his son had been healed. What a difference between that anxious, desperate dash up to Cana for help, and the leisurely trip back home. The difference was faith in Jesus, faith that took Him at his word. The third answer to overcoming sorrow and difficulty is to act on what you believe. Besides these answers to overcoming sorrow and difficulty when it strikes our lives, I have three applications for you today. First, the nobleman came, talked to

Jesus, and then went on his way without any tangible evidence that his request had been granted. Why? Because in meeting Jesus and in talking to Him, his fear and anxiety evaporated. He took Jesus at His word. It can be the same for you. You may be weighed down under great burdens. You may be crying inside. We all have problems and pressures, but we can all come to Jesus. You can tell Him about it. He cares for you. He's delighted to ease your burden and pain, to take the crushing weight you're carrying and take it on Himself. But will you take Him at His word? Will you believe Him when He promises, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28)? Will you take Him at His word when He says, "Lo, I am with you always" (Matthew 28:20), or when He promises, "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27)? I can tell you that I've been inspired by those of you who are taking Jesus at His word, especially in the midst of difficult, trying circumstances. Men and women in vocational, medical and financial crises who have decided to live in faith in Jesus, taking Him at His word. I've been inspired by the people (especially the young people) who are tithing; who are taking God at His word when He says, "Test me in this and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it." It's a blessing and an encouragement to know that you are taking Jesus at His word, and He's making a difference in your life! Second, you can take Jesus at His word, you can have this faith in Him, even if the results are postponed. They may even be postponed until after this life. We suffer the death of a parent, a friend, a child. We experience sorrow and loss and sickness ourselves. We come to Jesus asking why, crying out for help, and we find Him saying, "I know what I am doing. I am working it all out." The Bible says, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). There will be circumstances in which we do not "see" with our eyes that this is true. But we can believe it because it's the promise of God Himself. We may have to pass through this dark night of this world into the bright day of the next world before we see how His good purpose has been worked out. Faith in Jesus is being sure of what we hope for, and certain of what we do not see. We can have faith knowing that Jesus knows, and cares and is working His plan for our good. Third, faith in Jesus is a gift of God, but it grows by exercise. Each one of us has opportunities to grow in faith as we find ourselves in difficult circumstances. In those trials, you can choose fear (that is, live in response to your difficult circumstance), or you can choose faith. If you turn to the claims and promises of your Savior and Lord, if you take Him at His word and act on that belief, you will grow in faith. It has been rightly said, "The best way to increase faith is to exercise faith. Trust Jesus as you can, and He will give you so much more than you expected that you will trust him more." It is this growing faith in Jesus that enables and empowers you to trust Him, to believe, and to act on that belief so that you can overcome the troubles, sorrows and tragedies you face in this life!

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